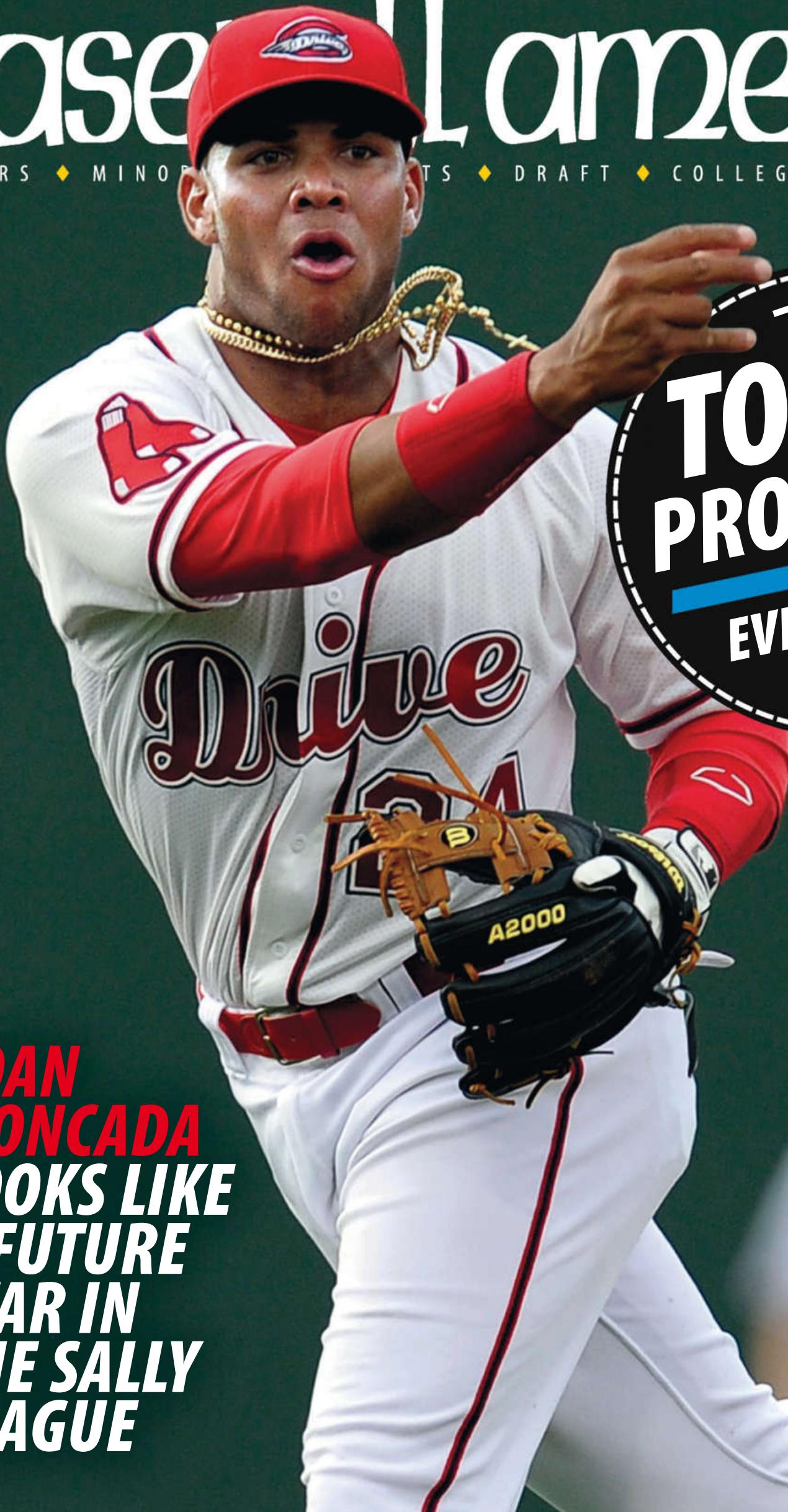


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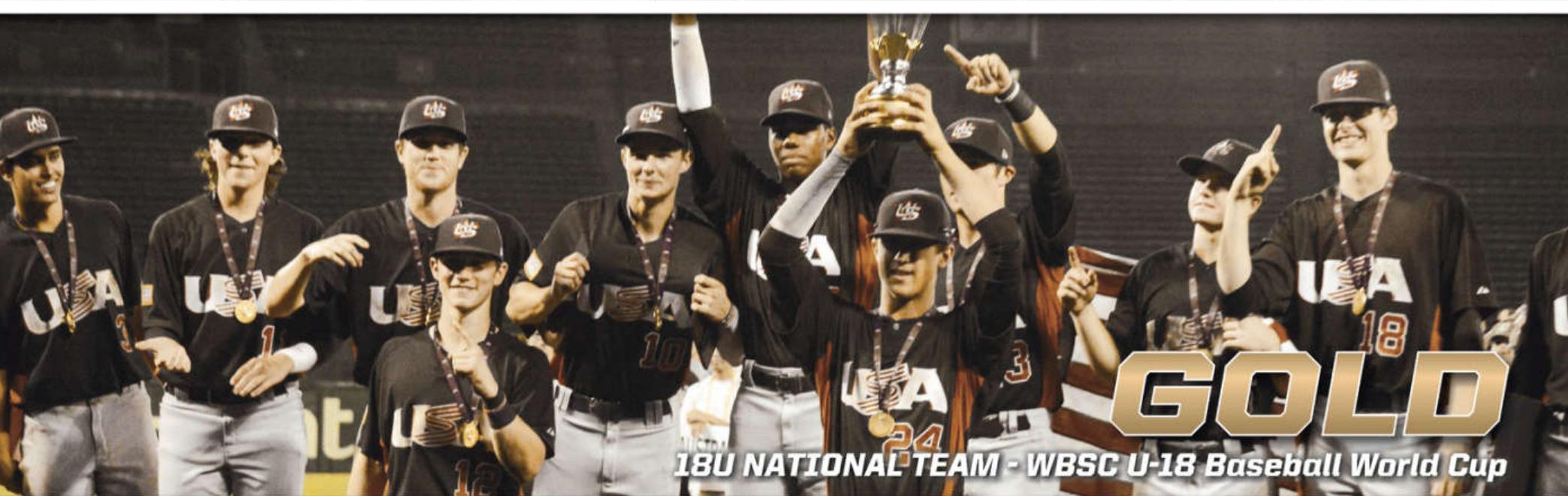


The
TOP 10
PROSPECTS
in
EVERY MINOR
LEAGUE

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A FUTURE
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ISSUE NO. 1522/151001 • OCTOBER 9–23, 2015



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Baseball America

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NEXT ISSUE

Talk about your tough calls. We're honoring our Major League Player and Rookie of the Year next issue, with no shortage of deserving candidates this year. The rookie class is particularly deep—Bryant, Correa, Lindor, Sano—so how could we go wrong? We'll also analyze each team's draft class and check in on instructional league.

COVER PHOTO: TOM PRIDDY

FROM THE archives

OCTOBER 22
2006

» IN THIS ISSUE: Peter Gammons, rehabbing a brain aneurysm, to his nurse: "How did Austin Kearns get to the Nationals?"
 » ALSO: Cole Hamels makes three Triple-A starts—2-0, 0.39 with 36-1 K-BB ratio—before getting call to Philadelphia.



Teen sensation Julio Urias may soon join former teen sensation Clayton Kershaw in the Dodgers rotation. Urias finished his fourth pro season as the top prospect in the Texas League at the same age (18) Kershaw began his first of three straight years ranking atop a minor league. Here's Kershaw's Gulf Coast League scouting report (written by former BA staffer and new Dodgers crosschecker Alan Matthews).

Kershaw maintained his stuff throughout the season, regularly showing a fastball that sat between 90-94 mph and touched 96, as well as a plus curveball. His changeup is solid average and has the makings of a dependable third offering. He has a loose arm and repeats his delivery, helping him command his pitches remarkably well for an 18-year-old.

"He has a good sense of how to pitch and he competes well," Dodgers manager Juan Bustabad said. "He goes right after the hitters and as soon as he got his first start, he was overpowering. He's going to move up fast."

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October 9–23, 2015

ASK BA

BY J.J. COOPER

BOUNCE FOR BENINTENDI:

Any chance Andrew Benintendi cracks the top 50 or 100 in the offseason? What's his ceiling, floor and reasonable projection?

RAFAEL MONERAT, @RAFAELMONERAT

Benintendi was one of the best hitters in Ohio when he was in high school. After a modest freshman season at Arkansas, he didn't play summer ball, so he didn't add to his scouting profile coming into his sophomore season.

But he quickly forced himself onto the national stage this season with a dominating year at Arkansas. He was Baseball America's College Player of the Year after leading college baseball with 20 home runs and was selected seventh overall by the Red Sox.

He was just as productive in his pro debut, hitting .313/.416/.566 with 11 homers between short-season Lowell and low Class A Greenville. The only real knock on Benintendi is that he has a short track record. He had one big year at Arkansas because he was a draft-eligible sophomore. But he has shown power, he's hit for average and he's walked more than he struck out both at Arkansas and in his first pro exposure.

On the scouting side, Benintendi has shown he has at least average productive power and plus raw power. He's an above-average runner who plays a solid center field. The only real scouting knock is that he doesn't look the part. Benintendi is short (5-foot-10) and his frame is closer to slight than stout.

A few scouts have agreed with the idea that Benintendi would likely have made it back to Arkansas for his junior year if he had come up through the ranks in the 1980s—his lack of size would have likely scared off scouts, forcing him to prove it with a second year of standout college production.

Will he be in our Top 100 Prospects list this offseason? Absolutely. Benintendi was ranked in the top 10 on the BA 500 coming into the draft and has done nothing to disappoint since then. That's the profile of at least a Top 100 Prospect. Top 50? We'll have to see, but it's certainly possible.

Benintendi has a chance to be an above-average hitter, above-average runner and solid-average power hitter at a premium defensive position. That's a strong combination.

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Orioles face big winter as season fizzles out



Jerry Crasnick

Baseball Writer,
ESPN.com

NEW YORK

The signature game of the Orioles' season took place in late April. With the streets of Baltimore awash in strife after the death of Freddie Gray, the Orioles closed the Camden Yards turnstiles and beat the White Sox 8-2 in an empty ballpark. Amid that bizarre and emotional backdrop, Baltimore players spoke passionately of their personal investment in the city and their desire to make fans proud.

Nearly five months later, the box scores are grim and the schedule is winding to a disappointing conclusion. After three straight winning seasons that included two playoff appearances and an American League East title, the Orioles are in play-out-the-string mode.

As manager Buck Showalter observes, the introspection and hard questions are probably best saved for the offseason, when the Orioles can take a deep breath and not have to worry about the next daunting road trip or fire-breathing David Price on the schedule.

"It's a snowball time of the year," Showalter said. "There's so much positive and negative feeding frenzy this time of year, nothing is as good or bad as it seems."

But you don't have to look far to explain why the Orioles are an AL East afterthought and any semblance of pennant fever has disappeared in Charm City. At the risk of sounding melodramatic, the Orioles are a classic case of a franchise at a crossroads.

It All Starts With Pitching

Baltimore's starting pitchers ranked near the bottom of the league in multiple categories this season, and seemingly no one was immune. Bud Norris, a 15-game winner in 2014, was so bad the Orioles released him in August. Chris Tillman took a significant step backward after two straight 200-inning seasons, and Ubaldo Jimenez pitched well in the first half only to spontaneously combust after the all-star break.

The Orioles lost left fielder Nelson Cruz to the Mariners and right fielder Nick Markakis to the Braves through free agency last winter, and they fell short in finding a strong replacement for either player. As the home-stretch approached, the Baltimore offense had amassed the fourth-highest strikeout total in the majors while ranking 25th in walks. And the Astros were the only AL team with a worse road record than Baltimore's 31-46 mark away from Camden Yards.

These are among the puzzles and short-

comings that Orioles general manager Dan Duquette and his front office team must confront as they watch the postseason unfold from the outside.

"Sometimes you make moves that help your team, and sometimes you make moves that you thought were the right moves that don't help your team," Duquette said. "I look at those things all the time."

"For the Orioles to get back to playing winning baseball, we need to do a lot of things better. We need to draft better. We need to develop better. We need to procure players better. We need to coach better, and we need to play better. We need to do all of those things better."

A 'Big Winter' Awaits

Ultimately, when they parse through the final numbers, Orioles fans are going to be less concerned with where the team is after the 162nd game than where the franchise ends up next spring in Sarasota, Fla. As Showalter readily concedes, "It's going to be a big winter."

Chris Davis, who leads the majors in home runs since the start of the 2012 season, is about to hit the mother lode in free agency. Catcher Matt Wieters, starter Wei-Yin Chen, reliever Darren O'Day and outfielders Steve Pearce and Gerardo Parra are also eligible for free agency in November.

The potential departures are particularly worrisome in Baltimore because the Orioles have one of the worst farm systems in the game. Elite pitching prospects Hunter Harvey and Dylan Bundy have endured multiple injury setbacks, and the pipeline is noticeably short of impact position-player talent.

First baseman Christian Walker, rated the franchise's best position prospect after last year, had a middling season in Triple-A, hitting .257/.324/.423 for Norfolk with 18 homers. Get beyond Machado and second baseman Jonathan Schoop, both 23, and the O's don't have a lot of young pups on the roster.

Duquette leaves open the possibility of some less-experienced prospects getting an opportunity with the big league club in spring training. That includes first baseman Trey Mancini, who logged a .981 OPS in 84 games with Double-A Bowie, and catcher Chance Sisco, who reached Bowie at a mere 20 years old. But it will take a major leap of faith for the Orioles to go to spring training counting on those players to have an impact for a contending team in 2016.

Challenges To Come

The Orioles have counted on undiscovered gems and pleasant surprises in recent years. Duquette unearths them, and Showalter cul-



Center fielder Adam Jones has been one of the few constants for the Orioles this season

tivates an environment in which they can thrive. Pearce was a wonderful feel-good story in 2014, when he came out of nowhere to rank ninth in the league with a 5.9 Wins Above Replacement. His performance helped drive the narrative when Duquette won Baseball America's Major League Executive of the Year Award last year.

This year, Pearce is muddling along with a batting average around .220 and a WAR slightly south of 0.0. Travis Snider was a disappointment before the Orioles released him in mid-August, and the O's have squeezed only so much production out of Jimmy Paredes, David Lough, Ryan Flaherty & Co.

"All the little piecing together that worked for Buck last year didn't work this year," a major league scout who follows the Orioles said. "It's not easy to do. They just didn't have as many pleasant surprises this year."

Shortstop J.J. Hardy's multiple visits to the disabled list hurt the Orioles' continuity, and just three Baltimore regulars (Machado, Adam Jones and Davis) appeared in more than 120 games this season. When the Orioles played a big series in Toronto and Showalter fielded a lineup with Junior Lake in the No. 8 spot and Paul Janish batting ninth against Price, it was the definitive sign that things haven't worked out according to plan.

"All the way up until mid-August, we were setting ourselves up for a good run at it," Jones said. "I'm not disappointed. I've been here when June comes around and you're planning your vacation. So the last four years have been amazing."

As the Orioles' resident leader and emotional engine, Jones has seen baseball in Baltimore come too far to succumb to gloom-and-doom. But he knows as well as anyone that the front office needs to come up with offseason answers. The Orioles have had a nice little run since 2012. But the window of opportunity appears to be closing, and there might be a lot more of this to come.

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THE INFIELD Mix AT THE NEW YANKEE STADIUM!

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MLB alters stance on eligibility for Cuban players

BY BEN BADLER

Cuban players may be given exemptions from Major League Baseball's registration policy, which would have a major impact on Cuban talent and which teams will be able to sign certain players.

The commissioner's office declared that 16-year-old outfielder Jonatan Machado and 17-year-old second baseman Omar Estevez will both be eligible to sign during the current 2015-16 international signing period. Under MLB's registration policy, any international player born after Sept. 1, 1995, (like Machado and Estevez) must officially register with the commissioner's office by May 15 to be eligible to sign during the following signing period that begins annually on July 2.

That rule has created a problem for young Cuban players, who have to leave Cuba and then establish residency in a foreign country before they can even register with the commissioner's office. So for players like Machado and Estevez, who were believed to still be in Cuba as of May 15, they could not have legally registered to sign. Despite language in the CBA that allows leeway for a player to be eligible if "the player has a compelling justification for his failure to register," the commissioner's office has previously had a blanket policy of not granting exemptions, even for Cuban players.

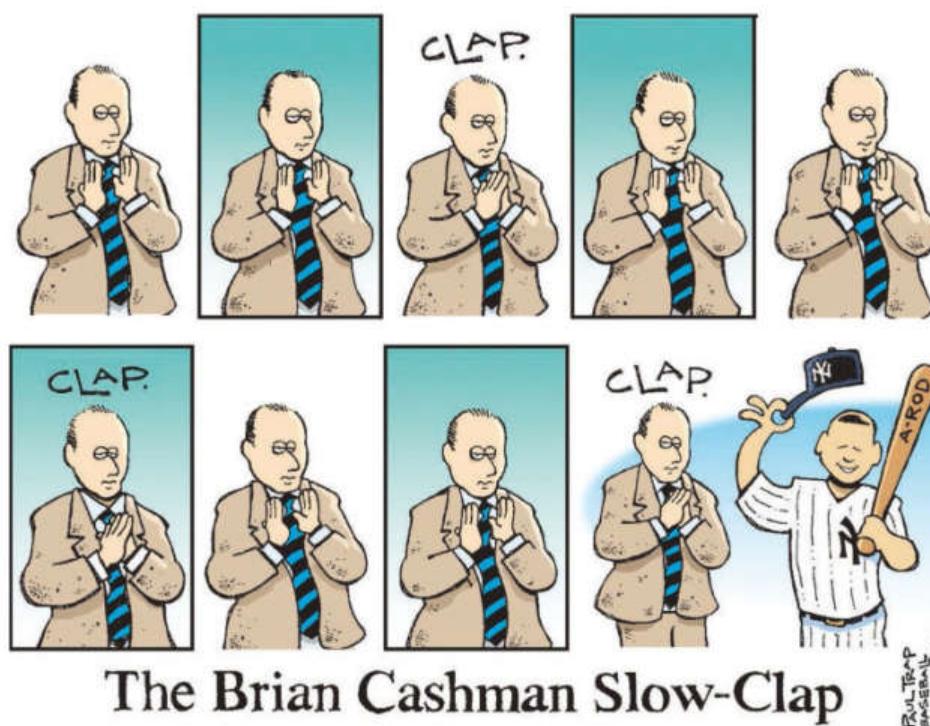
However, the league reviewed the cases of Estevez and Machado and "concluded that their lack of registration was due to no fault of their own. Because the Commissioner's Office finds that Estevez and Machado have demonstrated compelling justification for their failures to register by the May 15 deadline, they will be deemed eligible to sign as international amateurs beginning October 18, 2015."

That decision should have a broader impact beyond Estevez and Machado. Outfielder Jorge Ona, a 19-year-old who ranked as the No. 6 player in Baseball America's April rankings of the Top 20 players in Cuba with equivalent talent of a first-round draft pick, left the country this summer and would have had to wait until the 2016-17 signing period opened on July 2 to sign. Lefthander Cionel Perez and righthander Ronald Bolanos, two young Cuban pitching prospects, were facing the same timetable. Based on the Estevez and Machado precedent, it now appears that they should all become eligible to sign at some point during the current 2015-16 signing period.

That's a game-changer given the structure of the international signing system. The Cubs, Dodgers, Giants and Royals have exceeded their international bonus pools and won't be able to sign any pool-eligible players for more than \$300,000 for the next two signing periods beginning July 2.

PERSPECTIVE | Paul Trap

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The Brian Cashman Slow-Clap

Brewers covet Stearns for youth, experience

BY TOM HAUDRICOURT

MILWAUKEE

It is possible to be both young and experienced at the same time.

That's the way the Milwaukee Brewers looked at it when they named the Astros' David Stearns their new general manager. At 30, Stearns is easily the youngest GM in a sport that has trended in that direction for some time.

By comparison, Stearns is less than half the age of outgoing GM Doug Melvin, 63, who is moving into an advisory role.

"We focused on his experience," team principal owner Mark Attanasio said of the process that led to the hiring of Stearns, who was assistant general manager in Houston. "His experience is quite impressive. The fact that he was able to achieve all of that at a comparatively young age is only a benefit and testament to his work ethic and his drive."

Stearns indeed got an early start to his baseball career. Before he graduated from Harvard with a political science degree in 2007, he already had worked as an intern with the Pirates. After college, he worked briefly in the Arizona Fall League, then for his hometown Mets. Stearns later took a job in the Major League Baseball central office in New York,

where he learned the ins and outs of the business of the game while also cultivating contacts with several teams.

Stearns returned to the competitive side of baseball with a one-year stint as director of baseball operations for the Indians before being hired by Astros GM Jeff Luhnow to help rebuild that club.

The question all Brewers fans wanted to know is how long will it take Stearns to return the team to competitive mode. They stumbled out of the gate with a 5-17 record in April and never recovered.

"I'm a big believer in not setting limits for any team, for any year," Stearns said.

"This is a game with a tremendous amount of variability and we're going to take each decision as it comes and make each decision in the best interests of the overall health of the organization. The product on the field is a large component of that."

Asked if he thought it was possible for the Brewers to do something they haven't done in 46 years of existence, win a World Series, Stearns said, "I would not have come here if I did not think it was possible to win a World Series in Milwaukee."

One of Stearns' first meetings was with manager Craig Counsell, assuring him that he would stay on as manager.

IN SHORT | PEPPER

POLICE CHARGE FORMER RAYS PLAYER IN DEATHS

Police arrested **Brandon Martin**, a Rays supplemental first-round pick in 2011, and charged him with three counts of murder in the deaths of his father, uncle and another man in Corona, Calif., in mid-September.

Martin, a shortstop who received an \$860,000 bonus as the 38th overall pick in 2011, has not played since 2013 because of personal reasons. He batted .211/.281/.371 in parts of three seasons before the Rays released him in March.

Investigators said someone used a bat to inflict blunt force trauma injuries that caused the deaths of three people: Michael Martin, 63; Ricky Lee Anderson, 62; and Barry Swanson, 62. The attack occurred Sept. 17 at Martin's home in Corona. Martin, who is Brandon Martin's father, and Swanson, who was installing a security system at the house, died at the scene. Anderson, Martin's uncle, died two days later.

Police said Martin, 22, had been in a psychiatric care facility in Riverside, Calif., for a mental health evaluation after he made threats against his family. He was released in the week before the attack.

Following the attack, police arrested Martin on Sept. 18 after a vehicle and foot pursuit in Corona. Martin made his first appearance in Riverside County Superior Court on Sept. 22 and pleaded not guilty.

As DRAFT PICK SHOT

Mike Nolan, an 18th-round pick of the Athletics in 2014 who retired soon after, was shot in Yonkers, N.Y., and was in critical condition, police said.

The 6-foot-7 lefthander, who was drafted out of Oklahoma City University and hails from New York, was shot in the head and torso while in a Burger King parking lot in Yonkers.

"At this point, we believe he was an innocent victim," chief of detectives **Timothy Hodges** Hodges told reporters. "He's been a friend of the city of Yonkers and a person of high regard."

Nolan retired shortly after being drafted and was placed on the restricted list in 2014.

BROOKLYN AMONG WBC QUALIFIER SITES

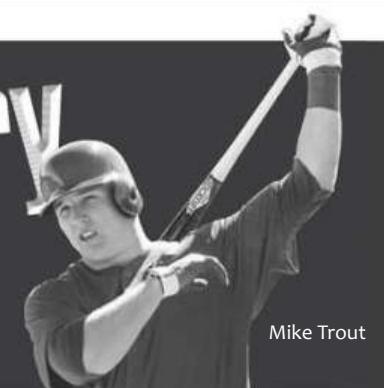
Major League Baseball and the World Baseball Softball Confederation unveiled the qualifying schedules for the 2017 World Baseball Classic, one of which is MCU Park in Brooklyn. The other sites are Sydney, Australia; Mexicali, Mexico, and Panama City, Panama.

The qualifiers will be a six-game, modified double-elimination format. The winners of the qualifiers will join 12 teams—Canada, China, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Italy, Japan, Korea, Kingdom of the Netherlands, Puerto Rico, Taiwan, United States and Venezuela—who received automatic bids after the 2013 WBC, which was won by the Dominican Republic.



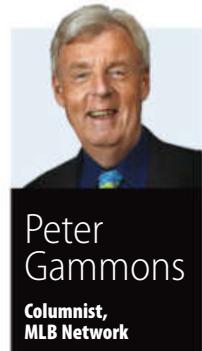
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Mike Trout

Searching for an ace pitcher can turn into house of cards



Peter
Gammons

Columnist,
MLB Network

BOSTON
Business analytics say that giving a 30-year-old pitcher a five- or seven-year contract is bad business.

So when Max Scherzer rejected a \$144 million offer from the Tigers, there was considerable speculation that he would never do better. Scherzer blew by \$144 million and signed for seven years, \$210 million with the Nationals.

It is true that having an ace is no guarantee of a World Series ring. Check Cy Young Award winners Scherzer, Justin Verlander and David Price against the Orioles last October. Or the Phillies not winning a World Series with Roy Halladay, Cliff Lee, Roy Oswalt and Cole Hamels. Then again, just remember what Madison Bumgarner did last October.

"I think every team that has a Clayton Kershaw and Zack Greinke, Jake Arrieta and Jon Lester, Matt Harvey and Jacob DeGrom or Gerritt Cole goes into the postseason thinking it can do what the Giants did last year," one National League manager said. "Sometimes it's more the person than the pitcher in his prime. But it helps everyone to have that guy who accepts the pressure he takes off other pitchers."

One American League general manager calls those pitchers "alpha dogs."

"I think you have to have a guy who takes the pressure off the other, younger pitchers," Red Sox pitching coach Carl Willis said.

"You have to make sure that an individual will not be impacted by a new environment," one manager said. "There's a lot of pressure on someone who comes in for big money, even more pressure in certain markets."

Alpha Possibilities

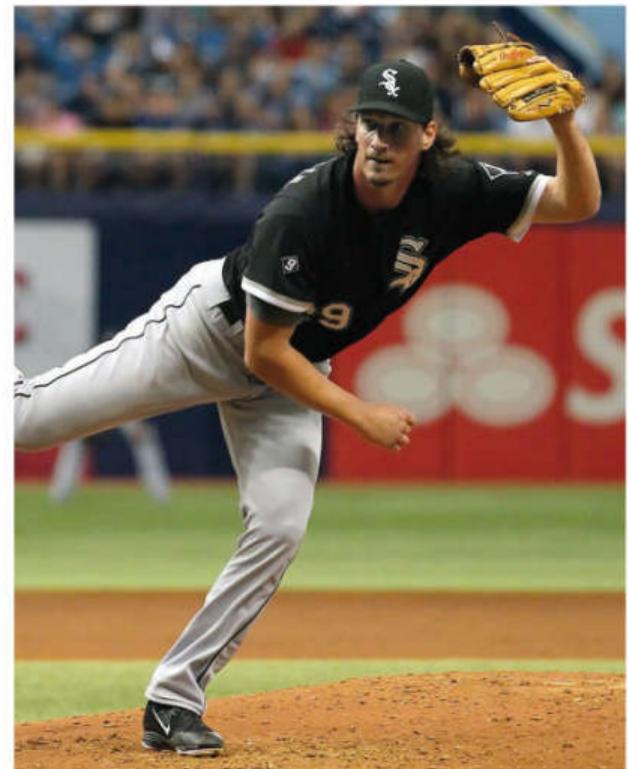
Jordan Zimmermann is a big-time makeup guy, but the Red Sox don't know how his power sinker will hold up in his thirties in the AL East. Jeff Samardzija is a lot better than he's pitched this year, but he's not going to get \$160 million to \$200 million. Mike Leake is reliable, athletic and interesting, but doesn't qualify as a No. 1 starter.

Several teams have been in Japan to scout Kenta Maeda, but one club reports "he can pitch, he's got a good curveball, but he's slight, may have trouble pitching every fifth day after going once a week in Japan and is more a backend guy."

The three potential alpha dogs are obvious: David Price, Zack Greinke and Johnny Cueto. Price is more than a horse who will have averaged more than 200 innings the last six years.

"He's the best pitcher teammate I've ever been around," said Tigers manager Brad Ausmus, a former catcher. "He got knocked out of a game in New York in the second inning, and he never left the bench. He's always cheering on his teammates, and his teammates know that. He and Kershaw are the two pitchers I've been around who go in from the bullpen expecting to go nine innings. He's unbelievable."

If Greinke were to opt out of his deal with the Dodgers, Price could end up in L.A., with Greinke going to Boston. But Greinke doesn't seem like a good fit with Boston's media.



CLIFF WELCH

Teams may hesitate giving free agent Jeff Samardzija a big deal this offseason after his struggles on the mound for the White Sox

Johnny Cueto's 2-6, 5.12 struggles with the Royals have dimmed his star, but his velocity is not down noticeably and he might have gotten away from his fastball/cutter base.

One thing is clear for teams looking for an ace this winter: Alpha dogs cannot be found at a breeder. It's not that easy.



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Veteran Buehrle can't slow down



Tracy
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DENVER

Blue Jays lefthander Mark Buehrle has the slowest fastball in the big leagues. Not that he cares.

Buehrle has been a soft tosser ever since he can remember. He has, however, always been on a fast track since he got his chance in pro ball. At the age of 36, in his 16th big league season and with a fastball that has averaged 84 mph, Buehrle is not slowing down.

Despite a left shoulder that he says is "a little banged up," Buehrle expresses no concern about being ready to play his part in helping the Blue Jays claim a postseason invite for the first time since 1993. And Toronto can only hope he is correct.

No sense doubting Buehrle now. He has never been a high-profile guy—not in the majors, the minors or as an amateur—but he has enjoyed nothing but success.

"Some guys throw 95, 96 mph and throw no-hitters," Buehrle said. "Guys ask me how hard I threw back in the day, and I tell them I proved you can get hitters out at 85-86."

Buehrle topped out at an average of 87 mph in 2007, according to BrooksBaseball.net. "I might have touched 90 on a good day, but I've

always been a control guy."

Always?

"Since I was a little kid," he said.

When Buehrle came out of high school in St. Charles, Mo., in 1997, there wasn't much ado about his baseball potential. Nearby Jefferson JC was the only school that offered him a chance to continue his baseball career.

"I matured late," the 6-foot-2, 240-pounder said. "My senior year in high school, people thought I was 12."

No Mistake

Midway through his first year at Jefferson, Buehrle talked to a pro scout for the first time.

"A scout from the Rangers came up to me and handed me a questionnaire," he said. "I thought it was a joke. We had another lefthander, Matt Skyles, who was a sophomore. I thought he might have mistaken the two of us."

It was no joke. It was no mistaken identity.

"I didn't know I was the first guy and I can't say I discovered him, but there was something about him," said Mike Grouse, then an area scout for the Rangers and now one of their professional scouts. "He topped out at 81, 82, but everything worked right."

"You couldn't see the ball come out of his hand. Velocity is what it is and everyone likes velocity, but when hitters don't see the ball and swing through it, you have to pay attention. I'm not saying I knew he was going to be

one of the best pitchers out there, but he was an ideal draft and follow."

And that's what Buehrle became; only it was the White Sox, not the Rangers, who called Buehrle's name in the 38th round of the 1998 draft. They took advantage of the old draft rule that allowed teams to keep a junior college player's rights until a week before the following year's draft. (The rule went away with the advent of a signing deadline.)

After watching Buehrle for another year, the White Sox signed him, and it paid off handsomely. On July 16, 2000, about 14 months after he signed his first pro contract—with just 217 innings of minor league experience—Buehrle was in the big leagues.

"There's no real science," Grouse said. "You see something you like and trust yourself. It doesn't always add up. I remember seeing him in the Midwest League and thinking I messed up. He was pitching better than I thought."

"Common sense said someone was going to catch up with him, but they haven't. He knows how to pitch. Back then, I'm not sure he knew what he was doing, but he was doing it. And now, he gets it."

He certainly does. "I've never been one of those guys who can throw it down the middle," Buehrle said. "I know I can't make mistakes over the plate. But I also know I have to work fast and throw strikes."

Buehrle has allowed 358 career home runs, 25th all time, but he also has averaged only



ROB CINI
Mark Buehrle hasn't lost much velocity over his 16-year career—because he never had it

2.01 walks per nine innings, 98th all time. He's a five-time all-star and a four-time Gold Glove winner. He has 213 wins and has thrown at least 200 innings in each of the past 14 seasons.

"I don't fit any of the (scouting) criteria," he said. "Even I am totally surprised (by it). But all I did as a kid was dream about getting to the big leagues."

For Buehrle, the dream came true.

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Unheralded callups have their own stories



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In the Year of the Prospect, many rookies were expected and hotly anticipated.

BA staffers got giddy when Kris Bryant made the majors, even more for Addison Russell and Carlos Correa, and continued during a season that saw Kyle Schwarber, Michael Conforto, Luis Severino, Hector Olivera, Trea Turner and Corey Seager reach the majors.

Our Matt Eddy chronicles every major league debut and notes the signing scout and scouting director of every player who fulfills their goal. It's a highlight of our website and Scoreboard (in this issue on Page 46), and it's fun to go through and inspect all the new big leaguers, especially in September. It also brings to light some of the most unlikely players to reach the majors, and that led to some digging. Here are four players I would never have predicted to reach the big leagues.

RYAN DULL, RHP, ATHLETICS: Dull was never a big prospect as a 5-foot-11 righty coming out of East Forsyth High in Winston-Salem, N.C. He pitched four seasons at UNC Asheville and compiled a modest 16-26, 4.65 career record. But he threw a ton of strikes his senior season in 2012, with an 84-13 strikeout-walk ratio, and Athletics area scout Neil Avent was impressed.

"He was one of those guys that always threw well when I saw him and felt that he deserved an opportunity," Avent said.

Avent benefited when then-UNC Asheville coach Tom Smith and then-VMI coach Marlin Ikenberry worked together to get seven innings in on a Friday night despite approaching rain. Dull threw well enough for Avent to turn him in as a potential draft pick, and the A's took him in the 32nd round of the 2012 draft.

Dunn, 25, just needed a chance; he has done the rest. He racked up 42 saves and a 2.07 ERA in 209 minor league innings,

with 259 strikeouts, to earn a September callup this year. He honed the command of his 90-93 mph fastball and low-80s fading changeup and started his career with 11 scoreless innings.

"He has certainly made the most of his opportunity with us; I am very proud of him," Avent said. "He's a really humble kid. It's not every day that we get guys that make it to the big leagues, let alone a guy that you took in the 32nd round."

ROCKY GALE, C, PADRES: Gale's father Paul scouts for the Astros, and his brother Keeton has appeared in the pages of BA as a photographer. But Rocky has passed them both, reaching the major leagues for the first time this year.

Gale's ascent surprised even his signing scout, Justin Baughman, who reached the majors as an infielder with the Angels at the end of the 20th century. He had just started scouting in 2010 when Gale was a senior at Portland, coming off a .194 junior season.

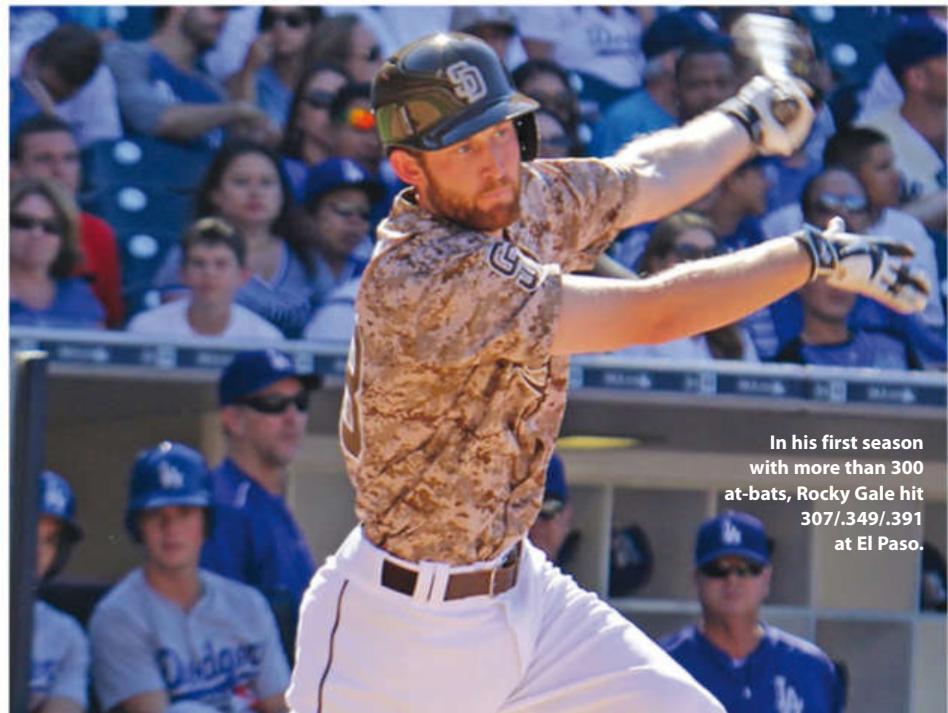
"He just didn't hit his junior year. He got passed over (in the draft), then went to an eye doctor, and as it turns out he was wearing the wrong prescription," Baughman said. "And he started hitting again. The bat still wasn't what we considered a major league bat, but I thought he was very gifted behind the plate."

Baughman wasn't sure whether to turn in Gale for the draft when his crosschecker, Pete DeYoung came in to see San Diego, which had pitchers Kyle Blair and Sammy Solis, against Gale's Portland club.

In one game, Baughman remembered, Gale "hit a double and a homer, threw out two guys at second trying to steal, one guy at third from his knees on a blocked ball Pete leaned forward and looked my way and said, 'Hey, you might want to turn this guy in.'"

The Padres ended up taking Gale in the 24th round of the 2010 draft. He has been a backup most of his minor league career; only in 2015 has he exceeded 300 at-bats in a season, and had his best year, hitting .307/.349/.391 at Triple-A El Paso. When Gale got called up, Baughman felt like it was his own second chance.

"I think I enjoy it more on this side," he said. "I probably took it for granted on the other side; I didn't really understand what



In his first season with more than 300 at-bats, Rocky Gale hit .307/.349/.391 at El Paso.

KEETON GALE

my opportunities were. Having learned from it now, I have renewed excitement for people who make the big leagues. I feel more excited for Rocky than I did when I was called up."

RYAN O'ROURKE, LHP, TWINS: This is cheating a bit, as O'Rourke came up in July as a lefty specialist. But he is the first player drafted out of Division II Merrimack (Mass.) to make it to the majors—and his signing scout, John Wilson, is a fine storyteller.

Wilson liked O'Rourke in 2010 and didn't think many other teams were on him. He went to a late-season start against Pace (N.Y.) mostly to scout the scouts, as he was confident he had a good read on O'Rourke's physicality, low-90s fastball and ability to spin a breaking ball. Wilson said he saw six or seven scouts there, and he remained confident as O'Rourke's stuff wasn't at its best.

Then Bobby Valentine and Ralph Branca showed up. Valentine was working for ESPN at the time, and a neighbor's son was playing for Pace. Branca, Valentine's father-in-law, took notice of O'Rourke's 6-foot-3, 220-pound frame. And as soon as he did, Wilson's chances of keeping O'Rourke under wraps were over.

"Branca looks out toward the mound," Wilson said, "sees O'Rourke warming up before the third inning, and says to the scouts, 'Boys, that's what they look like in the big leagues.'"

RYAN WEBER, RHP, BRAVES: For a long time, it looked like Weber peaked at 18. As we wrote in 2008, when he was a senior at Clearwater (Fla.) Central Catholic High: "Weber is an undersized righthander with an oversized resume."

Weber used a strong body and excellent command to star for USA Baseball's 16-and-under and 18-and-under national teams in 2006-08. Former 16U national team director Jeff Singer recalls Weber as a "nasty little 5-foot-10 kid" who competed, had tremendous action on his fastball and control.

"He threw the first no-hitter for the 16U program against Venezuela," Singer said, "and then beat Venezuela again in the title game. He was our ace without a doubt."

Weber was slated to go to Florida but wound up at St. Petersburg (Fla.) JC and then signed with the Braves as a 22nd-round pick in 2009. He had an ordinary pro career, finally reaching Double-A as a 23-year-old last year. As the Braves' 2015 season spiraled, Weber earned a trial in the big league rotation.

He joined 16U teammate Mychal Givens of the Orioles in reaching the majors this season, with Givens making it after shifting from shortstop to pitcher. All three catchers on that team—Kyle Skipworth, Max Stassi and Mac Williamson—have reached the majors as well.

Big leaguers can come from anywhere. They aren't all Carlos Correa, and that's OK.

WILSON® DEFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE YEAR WATCH

Nolan Arenado, 3b, Rockies

While Arenado has excelled at the plate this season, setting career highs in nearly every meaningful offensive statistic and earning his first trip to the All-Star Game, his defense has remained sensational. In mid-September, Arenado led all third basemen with a 3.18 range factor per game and was credited with 16 defensive runs saved above average. Known more for his bat than his glove as an amateur, the 24-year-old has worked hard to become an elite defender in the major leagues, capable of making highlight-reel plays seem routine.

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CAPTAIN'S CATCHER'S AWARD

Improved bat allows Diaz's glove to shine

BY JOHN PERROTTO

PITTSBURGH

Like most little brothers, Elias Diaz, as he was growing up in Venezuela, wanted to imitate his big brother.

Diaz's older brother was a catcher. So when Diaz was 6 years old and played his first game, he felt it was only natural that he put on the catching gear, even though it likely weighed nearly as much as he did at the time.

"I loved it," he said. "That's all I wanted to do—be a catcher."

The Pittsburgh Pirates prospect has become so adept at playing the position that he has won the 2015 Captain's Catcher Award for being the best defensive catcher in the minors.

"That's a great honor," Diaz said. "I take a lot of pride in my defense. Defense always comes first for me. I have to take care of the pitchers. That's the most important part of the job. All the rest comes after that."

Diaz, 24, is most noted for his strong arm. Though humble by nature, he lights up and shows extreme confidence when asked about his throwing.

"I feel like I am threat to throw anybody out who tries to challenge me," he said.

Diaz threw out 30 percent (14 of 46) runners attempting to steal this season at Triple-A Indianapolis. During his six minor league seasons, he has caught 29 percent (186 of 637).

"He's got a gun," said Tom Prince, who was a major league catcher for 17 seasons and managed Diaz at both high Class A Bradenton and Double-A Altoona.

While the arm is Diaz's best tool, the 6-foot, 210-pounder is also mobile behind the plate and sets a good target. He has become an above-average pitch framer, which is a point of emphasis throughout the organization.

"I threw to him in spring training and enjoyed it," veteran Pirates righthander A.J. Burnett said. "He knows what he's doing back there, especially for a young kid."

Righthander Tyler Glasnow, the organization's top prospect, finished this season at

Indianapolis and also was paired with Diaz last year in the Arizona Fall League. Glasnow raves about Diaz.

"He's just a great defensive catcher," Glasnow said. "You don't realize how important a great defensive catcher is until you work with someone like him. He got me a ton of calls with the way he frames pitches. It's definitely a confidence booster with him behind the plate."

Diaz, though, takes special pride in his ability to work with his pitchers. It has been a process that hasn't always come easily because he arrived to his first spring training in 2008 at Bradenton, Fla., with the limited English vocabulary of "hello" and "how are you?"

Diaz worked hard to improve his English and now speaks to his teammates with ease.

"I tried real hard to learn English as soon as I came to the United States," Diaz said. "I still work hard at it. I try to learn a new word or a couple of words every day. It's very important to be able to communicate both at the ballpark and away from the park. I think my English has improved. It's not perfect but it's pretty good now."

Hitting A Crossroads

Diaz's hitting may have improved as dramatically as his English over the last three years after he struggled mightily at the plate during his first three seasons in the United States. He struggled at the plate in each of his first three seasons. Diaz understood he was at a crossroads in his career despite the great defensive tools. And he decided to do something about it by taking the more-is-less approach with the bat.

"You can't be a starting catcher in the major leagues if you aren't at least a decent hitter," Diaz said. "I knew what the problem was—I would panic when I was at the plate, put too much pressure on myself to try to get a hit."

"I knew I had to find a way to relax, take a deep breath and just relax. I quit worrying about hitting home runs, trying to hit the ball hard, and I concentrated on hitting the



Elias Diaz has a strong arm, quick feet and a knack for framing pitches on the edges of the strike zone

ball up the middle and hitting the ball the other way."

The results followed.

Diaz batted .279/.382/.399 in 220 plate appearances in 2013 with Bradenton, a combined .312/.366/.421 in 404 plate appearances with Altoona and Indianapolis last year and .271/.330/.382 in 363 plate appearances at Indy this season.

Diaz admitted being a step away from the major leagues caused him to revert to old habits at times this season, and Indianapolis hitting coach Butch Wynegar, who caught for 13 seasons in the majors, would rein him back in.

"My swing would get long and Butch would ask what I thought (Pirates manager) Clint Hurdle would expect of me if I got called up to the big leagues," Diaz said. "I knew what he meant. I just had to stay with the approach that worked for me."

Diaz received a September callup to serve as the third-string catcher behind veterans Francisco Cervelli and Chris Stewart.

Diaz clearly passed Tony Sanchez, the Pirates' first-round draft pick in 2009, on the organizational depth chart at catcher. Sanchez did not get a callup after Indianapolis lost to Columbus in the championship series in the International League.

Neither Cervelli nor Stewart are eligible for free agency until following the 2016 season, so the Pirates might opt to send Diaz back to Indianapolis for more development at the

start of next season.

Future In The Show

Diaz isn't thinking that far ahead. He is just enjoying his first taste of the major leagues.

"I can't even describe how exciting it's been to be in the big leagues," Diaz said. "It's been a dream come true."

"I've learned a lot. So much more of the game is mental in the big leagues, especially with all the scouting reports and information you have on all the hitters. I've learned a lot just being in the scouting meetings and listening to coaches and other catchers talk."

The Pirates believe Diaz's late-season callup is just the beginning for a prospect who has been named his league's best defensive catcher in BA's Best Tools surveys three years running.

"Elias has progressed every year defensively—and as a complete player," Pirates assistant general manager Kyle Stark said. "He has always had some impressive physical tools, but has worked hard to refine them. He has worked on his release to help his above-average arm strength play quick and accurate. He has worked on his receiving to enhance his already solid hands. And he has worked hard to understand game plans, attacking hitters, and general pitch philosophies."

"His growth on the offensive side of the ball is obvious, and that has come down to him slowing himself down—mentally and physically—and committing to a solid attack plan."



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THE 10 FINALISTS FOR THE CAPTAIN'S CATCHER'S AWARD

This is the fifth year of the **Captain's Catcher's Award**, presented by All-Star. Here's a look at how the four previous winners fared in 2015.

2011: TRAVIS D'ARNAUD, C, NEW YORK (NL). d'Arnaud missed time with a sprained elbow but otherwise he's been a key factor in New York's run to a potential NL East title as the club's everyday catcher.

2012: TIM FEDEROWICZ, C, SAN DIEGO. Federowicz had an injury-riddled 2015 season as he missed the first half of the season with a left knee injury. It took him a while to get back to full speed and he finished the season as the club's catcher at Triple-A El Paso.

2013: AUSTIN HEDGES, C, SAN DIEGO. San Diego gave Hedges a taste of the big leagues as the club's backup catcher. He struggled offensively but was sound defensively.

2014: BLAKE SWIHART, C, BOSTON. Promoted to the big leagues ahead of schedule because of injuries, Swihart has had to learn on the job, getting better and better as the season progressed.

2015'S TOP CANDIDATES

Player	Team	PCT	G	E	PB	SBA	CS	PCT
Armando Araiza	Tampa Bay	.984	84	10	9	80	36	.450
Elias Diaz	Pittsburgh	.984	60	7	4	46	14	.304
Mitch Garver	Minnesota	.993	77	4	6	74	28	.378
Joe Hudson	Cincinnati	.983	78	11	13	74	37	.500
Tom Murphy	Colorado	.976	85	15	11	79	24	.304
Brian Navarreto	Minnesota	.997	84	2	11	89	50	.562
Roberto Pena	Houston	.993	72	4	2	51	25	.490
Pedro Severino	Washington	.981	91	8	9	95	36	.379
Beau Taylor	Oakland	.997	73	2	9	79	38	.481
Tony Wolters	Cleveland	.994	56	3	3	77	38	.494

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Prospect season begins at BA

Baseball America has been ranking the top prospects in each minor league since 1982. Every year we talk to managers, coaches and scouts to determine the players in each league who project to be future big league contributors.

Consider this the start of the prospect season, which will continue as we rank the Top 10 Prospects for every organization in print and online at BaseballAmerica.com, followed by the Top 30 Prospect lists for each team in the Baseball America Prospect Handbook. And after the Handbook arrives, we'll rank the Top 100 Prospects in all of baseball.

To qualify for the league lists, starting pitchers need to have one-third of an inning for each team game (about 20-22 innings in a short-season league and 44-46 innings in a full-season league). Relievers must have 20 appearances in a full-season league or 10 appearances in a short-season league. Hitters must have one plate appearance per team game (about 70 plate appearances for a short-season league and 140-144 in a full-season league).

Players can qualify even if they later exhaust their rookie eligibility, and players can rank in more than one league. League context does play a factor in these rankings, which is why players may rank in one order in one league and a different order in another league.

For scouting reports on the players ranked 11-20 on each list, subscribers can go to BaseballAmerica.com.

Each league is ranked on a five-star system, with five stars marking an outstanding year for the league and one star noting a exceedingly down year for talent. All leagues are judged in the context of the expectations of the league—the eight-team Carolina League is not expected to have as much talent as a 16-team Midwest League. And leagues closer to the majors are expected to have more Top 100 talents.

This year there were three five-star leagues, three four-star



Trea Turner impressed in two leagues before heading to D.C.

leagues, four three-star leagues, three two-star leagues and two one-star leagues.



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TRIPLE CROWN SPORTS



Lindor, Severino headline deep IL class

BY JOSH LEVENTHAL

The Triple-A International League served its purpose as a finishing school for many prospects moving on to the majors this season, with all but two members of the Top 10—and 15 of the Top 20—advancing to the big leagues after making appearances—in some cases, quite brief—in the league.

A particularly deep crop of IL prospects this season forced several intriguing players off this list, including a trio of Gwinnett prospects in catcher Christian Bethancourt, righthander Mike Foltynewicz and lefty Manny Banuelos, plus slick-fielding Pawtucket shortstop Deven Marrero and strikeout-prone sluggers Richie Shaffer of Durham and Steven Moya of Toledo.

And the prospect list would have been even deeper if a group of standouts hadn't finished just short of qualifying thresholds of 48 innings or 144 plate appearances. The group includes Durham lefty (and Minor League Player of the Year) Blake Snell, Gwinnett righthander Tyrell Jenkins, Indianapolis righty Tyler Glasnow and Pawtucket catcher Blake Swihart.

1. FRANCISCO LINDOR SS

COLUMBUS (INDIANS)
AGE: 21. B-T: B-R. HT: 5-11. WT: 190. DRAFTED: HS—Monteverde, Fla., 2011 (1).

Lindor finished 2014 with a 38-game run at Columbus, and the Indians sent him back there this season to address a few areas for improvement. Team officials have publicly said they wanted Lindor to limit his defensive lapses, and sent special assistant John McDonald to work with him. They also believed the switch-hitting Lindor could do a better job from his non-natural left side.

League observers say Lindor accomplished that mission by the time Cleveland called him up in June. He is a true major league shortstop, with plus range, an above-average arm and a knack for making special plays.

Lindor impacted the ball better from the left side, and even though his offensive numbers didn't pop in Columbus, his line-drive stroke to all fields should yield more power down the road. He has above-average speed but still is learning the art of stealing.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
141	15	50	12	1	4	24	8	25	2	0	.355	.384	.539

son, which allowed him to drive the ball to all fields. He has above-average raw power that he's tapping into more, though he's still too aggressive at times. Franco lacks foot speed but is adequate defensively with a laser arm.

"The potential is there," Pawtucket manager Kevin Boles said. "He can bat four-five-six in the middle of a lineup. Those type of bats don't come around too often."

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
141	15	50	12	1	4	24	8	25	2	0	.355	.384	.539

4. TREA TURNER SS

SYRACUSE (NATIONALS)
AGE: 22. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-1. WT: 175. DRAFTED: North Carolina State, 2014 (1/Padres).

After arriving in June as the player to be named from a three-team deal last offseason, Turner breezed through Double-A Harrisburg in just 10 games and showed off his offensive and defensive potential with Syracuse. The Nationals called him up in late August, but he has largely served as an observer in the majors.

Turner comes to the Nationals with plenty of tools and could develop another if his power develops as he fills out a still-lanky frame. He uses blazing speed as a threat on the basepaths and to beat out infield hits. Turner has good hands at shortstop and solid but not spectacular range. He makes up for average arm strength with fundamentals and must continue to do so to stay at the position. His final two starts with Syracuse came at second base, where some scouts project him to settle.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
136	15	41	7	1	6	23	11	27	0	0	.301	.353	.500

5. EDUARDO RODRIGUEZ LHP

PAWTUCKET (RED SOX)
AGE: 22. B-T: L-L. HT: 6-2. WT: 210. SIGNED: Venezuela, 2010 (Orioles).

Rodriguez completed his dash to the big leagues just 10 months after arriving from the Orioles in a trade and, after overwhelming IL hitters with a power three-pitch mix, yielded one run in his first 14 2/3 innings with the Red Sox. Key to his rise to the majors was the development of his slider, which is now a tight-breaking pitch that gives him a third pitch to go with his fastball-changeup combo.

Rodriguez's command of a mid-90s fastball that he can locate to both sides of the plate has also been a key. And he complements it with a changeup that became particularly effective as he focused on not overthrowing it.

W	L	ERA	G	GS	SV	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	Avg
7	0	1.91	11	11	0	61	40	18	13	0	17	50	.184

2. LUIS SEVERINO RHP

SCRANTON/WILKES-BARRE (YANKEES)
AGE: 21. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-0. WT: 195. SIGNED: Dominican Republic, 2011.

Severino arrived at Scranton/Wilkes-Barre at the end of May and didn't need long to become the best pitcher in the IL. He yielded two or fewer runs in all but one start and closed out his tenure with 10 strikeouts and one hit over six innings against Lehigh Valley.

While opposing managers lauded Severino's stuff—a 92-97 mph fastball that typically sits at 95 and is complemented by a solid low-80s changeup and solid-average slider—many were equally impressed with his command, composure and athleticism on the mound. Severino can pitch to spots by locating his fastball to either side of the plate and at the top and bottom of the strike zone, while keeping hitters off-balance with a fading changeup. He's not afraid to pitch to contact, yet did not yield a home run with the RailRiders.

W	L	ERA	G	GS	SV	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	Avg
7	0	1.91	11	11	0	61	40	18	13	0	17	50	.184

3. MAIKEL FRANCO 3B

LEHIGH VALLEY (PHILLIES)
AGE: 23. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-1. WT: 215. SIGNED: Dominican Republic, 2010.

Franco made his Triple-A debut last season as a 21-year-old and struggled to adjust to a heavy dose of breaking and offspeed pitches. He returned there this year and made quick work of opposing pitchers before getting the call to Philadelphia in May.

IL observers noted Franco's improved strike-zone awareness compared to last sea-



Francisco Lindor

when Owens tossed 122 innings at Pawtucket before advancing to Boston in late July.

Owens mixes a big-breaking, 12-to-6 curveball and an above-average changeup to go with an 88-92 mph fastball that, when he's at his best, he locates on the inner-half of the plate against righthanded batters. Hitting that spot with his fastball is key to his success—it sets up his changeup and prevents hitters from leaning over the plate for his breaking pitches. He brought a slider back to his repertoire, steadily throwing more of it as a back-door complement to his curveball. Owens is a hard-worker, but he's lanky with long limbs, so repeating his delivery is a challenge.

W	L	ERA	G	GS	SV	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	Avg
3	8	3.16	21	21	0	122	84	47	43	7	56	103	.193

9. JOSE BERRIOS RHP

ROCHESTER (TWINS)
AGE: 21. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-0. WT: 185. DRAFTED: HS—Bayamon, P.R., 2012 (1s).

Berrios advanced to Rochester in early July after breezing through the Southern League at Double-A Chattanooga and just a couple of weeks before appearing in the Futures Game for a second straight year. He looked like a future all-star during his 12 starts with the Red Wings, and he finished with 175 strikeouts that led all minor league pitchers.

At his best, Berrios works in the low- to mid-90s with a fastball that he can get hitters to wave at up in the zone or chase by sinking it at their knees. A changeup with late fade is his best offspeed pitch, and he mixes a slurry curveball that bores in on lefthanded hitters. He still leaves too many fastballs over the plate and his arm action can get long in the back.

W	L	ERA	G	GS	SV	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	Avg
6	2	2.62	12	12	0	76	59	24	22	6	14	83	.212

10. AARON JUDGE OF

SCRANTON/WILKES-BARRE (YANKEES)
AGE: 23. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-7. WT: 275. DRAFTED: Fresno State, 2013 (1).

That Judge didn't duplicate the big numbers he produced at Double-A Trenton in the IL hardly damped the optimism surrounding the hulking outfielder. He topped all Yankees minor leaguers with 20 homers, though just eight came at Triple-A as he struggled for stretches against experienced pitchers who found holes in his swing with breaking and offspeed pitches. He did show the ability to make adjustments and punish mistakes.

Judge uses a gap-to-gap approach with bat speed and natural strength to drive the ball. A league observer compared him with Giancarlo Stanton for his power to all fields and Miguel Sano because he touches balls and they go.

Judge is agile and athletic for his size. He moves well and has more than enough arm strength to play on an outfield corner.

W	L	ERA	G	GS	SV	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	Avg
228	27	51	10	0	8	28	29	74	6	2	.224	.308	.373

THE SECOND TEN

11. Robert Stephenson, rhp, Louisville (Reds).
12. Josh Bell, 1b, Indianapolis (Pirates).
13. Brian Johnson, lhp, Pawtucket (Red Sox).
14. Jose Peraza, 2b/of, Gwinnett (Braves).
15. Rusney Castillo, of, Pawtucket (Red Sox).
16. Dalton Pompey, of, Buffalo (Blue Jays).
17. Matt Wisler, rhp, Gwinnett (Braves).
18. Gary Sanchez, c, Scranton/W-B (Yankees).
19. Aaron Altherr, of, Lehigh Valley (Phillies).
20. Deven Marrero, ss, Pawtucket (Red Sox).



Seager leads the way in new-look PCL

BY TEDDY CAHILL

Last fall's affiliation shuffle changed the look of the Pacific Coast League, as six of the league's 16 teams went into this season with a new parent club. Some of the league's longest relationships ended, such as the Rockies concluding their 21-year affiliation with Colorado Springs to move to Albuquerque, and the Athletics moving to Nashville after 15 years in Sacramento.

Fresno and Oklahoma City, two other franchises that saw their affiliations change, experienced instant success on the field. In its first season as an Astros affiliate, Fresno reached the playoffs for the first time since 1998, won the league championship for the first time and then took the Triple-A National Championship (see Page 41).

Oklahoma City, the former Astros affiliate now with the Dodgers, also won its division. Damon Berryhill was named manager of the year and shortstop Corey Seager, ranked No. 1 on BA's Midseason Top 50 Prospects list, spent much of the season in Triple-A.

1. COREY SEAGER

OKLAHOMA CITY (DODGERS)

AGE: 21. B-T: L-R. HT: 6-4. WT: 215. DRAFTED: HS—Concord, N.C., 2012 (1).

Seager, the younger brother of Mariners third baseman Kyle Seager, has rocketed through the minor leagues since the Dodgers selected him 18th overall in 2012. He arrived in the PCL on May 1, four days after his 21st birthday, and was the fourth-youngest player to qualify for this list. He ranked as the No. 1 prospect in the game at midseason and completed his ascension to the big leagues in September after a solid Triple-A campaign.

Seager is an excellent all-around hitter. He has a loose, balanced swing and can hit for both average and power. He produces good bat speed and employs a mature approach at the plate, allowing him to drive the ball to all fields. Early in his career he would get overaggressive at times, but he slashed his strikeout rate to 14 percent this season as his pitch recognition improved.

While Seager is a below-average runner and is big for a shortstop, he's played the position capably throughout the minor leagues. His plus arm helps make up for his fringy range. The Dodgers began to introduce Seager to third base this season and he'll likely eventually move to the hot corner full time, but, for now, he's a capable shortstop.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
421	64	117	30	2	13	61	32	65	3	0	.278	.332	.451

2. JOEY GALLO

ROUND ROCK (RANGERS)

AGE: 21. B-T: L-R. HT: 6-5. WT: 230. DRAFTED: HS—Las Vegas 2012 (1s).

Gallo has long displayed his prodigious power. He led the minor leagues with 40 home runs in his first full season in 2013 and ranked second with 42 a year later. His powerful bat led him to make his major league debut in June when Adrian Beltre went on the disabled list.

Gallo has top-of-the-scale power and has shown the ability to drive the ball out of any ballpark at any time. He uses his large frame to generate tremendous bat speed and he is an aggressive hitter who doesn't get cheated at the plate. With that, however, comes a lot of swings and misses. He struck out in nearly 40 percent of his plate appearances at Round Rock, a number that is not out of line with his career rate of 35 percent.

Gallo is a below-average runner and is still developing defensively at third base, but he is athletic for his size and has a plus arm. This season, for the first time in his career, the Rangers used Gallo in the outfield, even playing him once in center. His swing-and-miss tendencies carry significant risk, but his power production gives him tantalizing upside.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
200	20	39	9	0	14	32	27	90	1	0	.195	.289	.450

3. STEVEN MATZ

LAS VEGAS (METS)

AGE: 24. B-T: R-L. HT: 6-2. WT: 200. DRAFTED: HS—East Setauket, N.Y., 2009 (2).

Though Matz was drafted in 2009, he didn't make his pro debut until 2012 following a prolonged recovery from Tommy John surgery. He's proved to be worth the wait and excelled at Las Vegas before making his major league debut in June.

Matz has a loose, easy delivery and throws his fastball in the mid-90s, occasionally reaching as high as 97 mph with the pitch. His changeup is his best secondary offering, and he also mixes in a good, high-70s curveball. He commands his whole arsenal well and isn't afraid to challenge hitters.

Matz still must prove he can handle a full season's workload, for he never has thrown more than 140 innings in a season and spent two months on the major league disabled list this year with a partial tear of the lat muscle on his left side.

W	L	ERA	G	GS	SV	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	Avg
5	2	4.48	12	12	0	68	67	39	34	6	28	61	.255

4. JON GRAY

ALBUQUERQUE (ROCKIES)

AGE: 23. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-4. WT: 235. DRAFTED: Oklahoma, 2013 (1).

Gray, advanced to Triple-A this season before making his major league debut in August. Just as the Rockies do in Colorado, the Isotopes make use of a humidor at their home park, but pitching in Albuquerque remains a difficult task. Gray's 4.33 ERA in 114 innings was the highest of his career, and he saw his hit rate (10.2 per nine innings) and walk rate (3.2) both climb.

Gray's stuff, however, remains powerful. His fastball sits in the mid-90s, peaking at 98 mph, and he typically pounds the zone with the pitch. His slider, which can reach 90 mph, can be an above-average offering, and he also throws a solid changeup. Gray still has work to do to refine his command and learn how to pitch at altitude. If he can fine-tune those parts of his game, he has the stuff to become a front-line starter in the big leagues.

W	L	ERA	G	GS	SV	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	Avg
6	6	4.33	21	20	0	114	129	61	55	9	41	110	.281

5. MARK APPEL

FRESNO (ASTROS)

AGE: 24. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-5. WT: 220. DRAFTED: Stanford, 2013 (1).

The difficulties Appel experienced in 2014, his first full season after he was selected No. 1 overall in the 2013 draft, have been well documented. But he has rebounded in the last year and reached Triple-A in June.

With Fresno, Appel had mixed results, at times looking like an elite starter, while struggling mightily in other appearances. At his best, he has three pitches that can be plus

RHP

ANDREW HEANEY

SALT LAKE (ANGELS)

AGE: 23. B-T: L-L. HT: 6-2. WT: 185. DRAFTED: Oklahoma State, 2012 (1/Marlins).

Heaney returned to the PCL to start the season and made 14 starts for Salt Lake before graduating to a regular spot in the Angels rotation. He stands out for his pitchability and advanced three-pitch arsenal. His sinker sits in the low 90s, peaking at 95 mph, and he mixes in a changeup and curveball.

Heaney repeats his easy delivery well, and he fills up the strike zone. His plus control helps his stuff play up, giving him the look of a mid-rotation starter.

W	L	ERA	G	GS	SV	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	Avg
6	2	4.71	14	14	0	78	95	49	41	2	25	74	.298

7. STEPHEN PISCOTTY

MEMPHIS (CARDINALS)

AGE: 24. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-3. WT: 210. DRAFTED: Stanford, 2012 (1s).

Piscotty began the year repeating the PCL with Memphis before he earned a promotion to St. Louis in July. He showed progress in his second year in the PCL before he graduated to the major leagues.

Piscotty has long been known for his hitting ability. He has an exceptional feel for the strike zone and a smooth, balanced swing that enables him to hit for average. He has maintained those strengths of his game this season, while also tapping into his raw power more consistently. His established a career high with a .203 isolated slugging percentage in the PCL, and that increase in power carried over to the major leagues.

Piscotty, a former third baseman, is a capable outfielder with a plus arm. He profiles well in right field, and that is where he primarily played with Memphis.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
320	54	87	28	2	11	41	46	62	5	6	.272	.366	.475



Corey Seager
ANDREW WOOLLEY

8. KETEL MARTE

TACOMA (MARINERS)

AGE: 21. B-T: B-R. HT: 6-1. WT: 165. SIGNED: Dominican Republic, 2010.

Marte completed his breakout 2014 season with Tacoma and returned to Triple-A to start this year. He got off to a hot start before he broke his thumb at the end of May. He missed all of June, but recovered in time to make his major league debut on July 31.

A switch-hitter, Marte has quick, line-drive swing and a good feel for the barrel. He is an aggressive hitter, but doesn't strike out often and increased his walk rate this year. He has above-average speed and knows how to use it.

Marte has primarily played shortstop and has the hands and infield actions for the position. But his average arm strength limits him, as does his propensity to make errors. He profiles better at second base, or possibly in center field, a position the Mariners briefly introduced him to this season.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
261	41	82	12	2	3	29	20	32	20	3	.314	.359	.410

9. TREVOR STORY

ALBUQUERQUE (ROCKIES)

AGE: 22. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-1. WT: 180. DRAFTED: HS—Irving, Texas, 2011 (1s).

Story has quick hands, produces plenty of bat speed and frequently drives the ball. But too often he gets out of balance at the plate and struggles to make consistent contact. He struck out 68 times in 275 plate appearances with Albuquerque, a number that is in line with his career strikeout rate of 26 percent.

Story has primarily played shortstop during his career, but also saw time at second and third base with the Isotopes. He is athletic and has enough arm strength for the left side, but may fit best as an offensive second baseman.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
256	37	71	20	4	10	40	16	68	7	1	.277	.324	.504

10. DILSON HERRERA

LAS VEGAS (METS)

AGE: 21. B-T: R-R. HT: 5-10. WT: 150. SIGNED: Colombia, 2010 (Pirates).

Herrera hit .327/.382/.511 in 81 games with the 51s, and would have finished fourth in the PCL batting race had he gotten enough plate appearances to qualify. But a three-week stay on the disabled list due to a broken finger and a few stints in the big leagues left him shy.

Herrera has an excellent feel for hitting. He's a disciplined hitter whose up-the-middle approach and quick swing enable him to hit for high averages. He has mostly gap power but has hit double-digit home runs in all three of his years in full-season ball. Herrera has an average arm and fringy range, but is a capable second baseman.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
327	68	107	23	2	11	50	28	59	13	9	.327	.382	.511

THE SECOND TEN

11. Aaron Blair, rhp, Reno (D-backs).
12. Chi Chi Gonzalez, rhp, Round Rock (Rangers).
13. Domingo Santana, of, Colorado Springs (Brewers).
14. Brandon Drury, 3b/2b, Reno (D-backs).
15. Preston Tucker, of, Fresno (Astros).
16. Marco Gonzales, lhp, Memphis (Cardinals).
17. Chris Bassitt, rhp, Nashville (Athletics).
18. Peter O'Brien, of/c, Reno (D-backs).
19. Tony Kemp, 2b/of, Fresno (Astros).
20. Taylor Jungmann, rhp, Colorado Springs (Brewers).



Giolito leads immensely talented EL

BY JOSH NORRIS

The Eastern League this year overflowed with talent. Of the 20 players on this list, 16 were taken in the top two rounds of the draft. Only one was selected later than the fifth round, and that guy, Bowie first baseman Trey Mancini, won the league's batting title.

Righthanders Jeff Hoffman and Michael Fulmer were used as chips at the trade deadline to move all-stars to contending teams. Outfielder Michael Conforto and righthanders Aaron Nola and Joe Ross already have graduated from prospecthood to major league mainstays. A whopping 13 of the 20 made our Midseason Top 50 Prospects.

Two of the top five prospects in the game, Harrisburg righthander Lucas Giolito and Reading shortstop J.P. Crawford, occupy the top two spots. Giolito, who qualified for this list in his last outing of the season, shook off a few early clunkers to show his usual dominant stuff and take the nod for the top spot.

1. LUCAS GIOLITO RHP

HARRISBURG (NATIONALS)

AGE: 21. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-6. WT: 255. DRAFTED: HS—Studio City, Calif., 2012 (1).

Giolito checks off plenty of the boxes necessary to project as a future ace. Big, physical body? You got it. Mid-90s fastball? Yep, that's there too. How about a knockout offspeed pitch? His curveball is plus right now and could be a better when it's all said and done.

Giolito had a rough start in the EL—he carried a 4.84 ERA through his first five starts—but later in the year showed exactly what he could do. The turning point, perhaps, was an Aug. 14 start at Bowie in which he fanned 11 batters in seven innings, tying season highs in both categories. That start was the second of five in a row in which he allowed two or fewer earned runs.

Giolito still has small details to iron out. He needs to become more consistent when it comes to repeating his delivery, and his changeup needs a touch more polish before it's ready for prime time.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
173	21	54	12	3	5	26	23	35	1	0	.312	.396	.503

2. J.P. CRAWFORD SS

READING (PHILLIES)

AGE: 20. B-T: L-R. HT: 6-2. WT: 180. DRAFTED: HS—Lakewood, Calif., 2013 (1).

Still just 20, Crawford has two consecutive Futures Game appearances to his credit and he walked more than he struck out in his first test at Double-A this season at Reading. Simply put, he's special.

A gifted fielder with range, Crawford has a strong arm and well above-average instincts, especially for someone his age. At the plate, he shows above-average contact skills, especially when he keeps his hands inside the ball, and he projects to be a plus hitter at the highest level. Evaluators are split on his power potential, with some projecting him to 10-12 home runs and others to 15-18 as he adds strength to his youthful frame.

He's a future first-division shortstop with all-star potential.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
351	53	93	21	7	5	34	49	45	7	2	.265	.354	.407

3. MICHAEL CONFORTO OF

BINGHAMTON (METS)

AGE: 22. B-T: L-R. HT: 6-1. WT: 215. DRAFTED: Oregon State, 2014 (1).

The Cubs' Kyle Schwarber was the only hitter to make it from the 2014 draft to the majors faster than Conforto, who showed enough promise in the EL to warrant a callup before spending a day in Triple-A. When he got to New York, he showed the same polished skill set evaluators saw all year at Binghamton.

Chief among Conforto's tools is his power, particularly the way it plays to all fields.

He distributed his home runs nearly evenly among left, center and right field, and he already had as many major league home runs (seven) through 40 games as he had as an Oregon State junior last year. Evaluators also noted an excellent two-strike approach and his unwillingness to chase pitches.

As a big league rookie, he has played exactly how he projects: an everyday player on a club that contends for the pennant.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
173	21	54	12	3	5	26	23	35	1	0	.312	.396	.503

4. TYLER GLASNOW RHP

ALTOONA (PIRATES)

AGE: 22. B-T: L-R. HT: 6-8. WT: 255. DRAFTED: HS—Santa Clarita, Calif., 2011 (5).

Not many pitching prospects in the game, let alone the EL, can match Glasnow's package of pitches and projection.

He starts with a fastball that consistently parks in the mid-90s and can peak even higher, and he couples it with a power curveball that one EL manager called the best he'd seen in the last five years. That one-two punch explains why the league reached Glasnow for just 41 hits in 63 innings—and why his career opponent average is an absurd .171.

Glasnow will need to work hard to repeat his delivery, and control issues remain a bugaboo. He also needs to work hard to control the running game after all 11 runners to attempt steals against him succeeded in the EL.

AB	L	R	H	G	GS	SV	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	Avg
7	3	2.43	12	12	0	63	41	22	17	2	19	82	.182	

5. JEFF HOFFMAN RHP

NEW HAMPSHIRE (BLUE JAYS)

AGE: 22. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-4. WT: 185. DRAFTED: East Carolina, 2014 (1/Blue Jays).

The Blue Jays used Hoffman as the headlining prospect in the deal with the Rockies that brought Troy Tulowitzki to Toronto. The 2014 first-round pick spent the first six weeks recovering from the Tommy John surgery he had before being drafted ninth overall.

When Hoffman returned to action at New Hampshire, he almost immediately reminded everyone why the Blue Jays risked their first-round selection on him. Now healthy, he's shown a power fastball in the mid-90s with plus movement. Add in a power curveball that peaks in the low 80s and a mid-80s changeup that also projects as above-average and you have the makings of a future No. 2 starter.

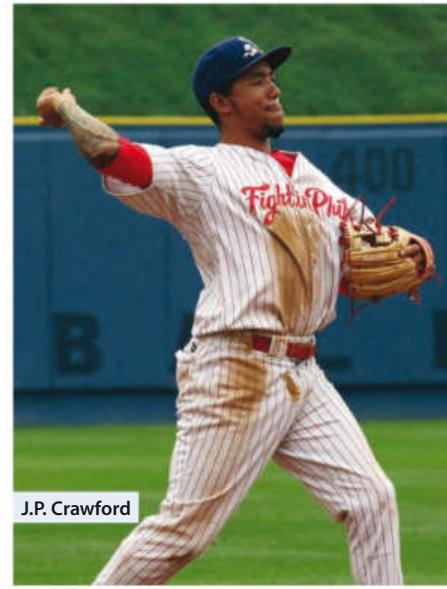
AB	L	R	H	G	GS	SV	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	Avg
351	53	93	21	7	5	34	49	45	7	2	.265	.354	.407	

6. AARON NOLA RHP

READING (PHILLIES)

AGE: 22. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-1. WT: 195. DRAFTED: Louisiana State, 2014 (1).

Heading into the season, Nola ranked as the



J.P. Crawford

portion of the zone, while his slider and changeup, both thrown in the low to mid-80s, each project as average or better pitches. His slider in particular often features plus two-plane break.

Ross challenges hitters, commands the ball to both sides and projects as a No. 3 starter.

W	L	ERA	G	GS	SV	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	Avg
2	2	2.81	9	9	0	48	36	16	15	3	12	37	.211

9. BRADLEY ZIMMER OF

AKRON (INDIANS)

AGE: 22. B-T: L-R. HT: 6-4. WT: 185. DRAFTED: San Francisco, 2014 (1).

After a loud stint at high Class A Lynchburg, Zimmer struggled a bit following a promotion to Akron. No matter the numbers, though, evaluators came away convinced that Zimmer's future is bright.

He split time between left and center field in the Carolina League but played exclusively in center once he reached Double-A. He's a smooth defender at the position who lopes across the outfield with long, fluid strides. He also shows off a better than average arm for the position. At the plate, Zimmer has the potential to hit for average and power, and those who saw him at Akron thought he might have been flustered by pitcher-friendly Canal Park. As a result, he might have over-compensated in his swing, which led to bad habits, over-aggression and ugly numbers.

If Zimmer reaches his ceiling, he'll become a top-of-the-order center fielder with speed and on-base skills with occasional power.

W	L	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
187	24	41	9	1	6	24	18	54	12	2	.219	.313	.374	

10. MANUEL MARGOT OF

PORTLAND (RED SOX)

AGE: 20. B-T: R-R. HT: 5-11. WT: 170. SIGNED: Dominican Republic, 2011.

After Margot started hot at high Class A Salem, the Red Sox aggressively pushed the 20-year-old to the more advanced EL, where he understandably found things a bit more challenging. He closed his time in Portland strong, ending the year on a six-game hitting streak that included hitting for the cycle.

Evaluators who saw Margot this year saw the potential for five tools, including power enough for double-digit longballs. Before he reaches that ceiling, however, he'll need to tone down his aggressiveness at the plate. He almost never strikes out but rarely walks.

In the outfield, Margot uses his plus speed to track down just about anything hit his way, making it easy to project him to stick in center field. The same aggression he showed at the plate also manifested on the bases, where opposing scouts and managers noted he had a tendency to run into outs on occasion.

W	L	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
258	38	70	21	4	3	33	21	36	19	8	.271	.326	.419	

THE SECOND TEN

1. David Dahl, of, New Britain (Rockies).
2. Trevor Story, ss/2b, New Britain (Rockies).
3. Gavin Cecchini, ss, Binghamton (Mets).
4. Andrew Knapp, c, Reading (Phillies).
5. Aaron Judge, of, Trenton (Yankees).
6. Greg Bird, 1b, Trenton (Yankees).
7. Mike Clevinger, rhp, Akron (Indians).
8. Trey Mancini, 1b, Bowie (Orioles).
9. Brandon Nimmo, of, Binghamton (Mets).
10. Josh Bell, 1b, Altoona (Pirates).



Twins win with prospects in SL debut

BY MATT EDDY

Construction delays at MGM Park forced Biloxi, in its first season as a Double-A Southern League franchise, to operate as a travel team until its new Mississippi home digs opened on June 6. The Brewers affiliate, which featured Top 10 Prospects in shortstop Orlando Arcia and righthander Jorge Lopez, didn't miss a beat and won a league-best 78 games.

While the Lookouts remained in Chattanooga, they welcomed a new parent organization in 2015, and the Twins made quite an introduction with their top three prospects. Even though outfielder Byron Buxton, third baseman Miguel Sano and righthander Jose Berrios left before the all-star break, Chattanooga won a first-half division title to advance to the SL playoffs.

As luck would have it, Biloxi and Chattanooga, two clubs with fresh outlooks in 2015, met in the SL finals, where the Lookouts (and their league-leading .750 OPS) defeated the Shuckers (and their league-best 3.25 ERA) in five games.

1. MIGUEL SANO 3B

CHATTANOOGA (TWINS)

AGE: 22. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-4. WT: 260. SIGNED: Dominican Republic, 2009.

Sano spent the second half of 2015 in Minnesota, but he began in a very different place. The hulking third baseman missed the entire 2014 season as he recovered from Tommy John surgery, then he hit just .159 for Chattanooga in April as he shook off the rust.

Sano picked up the pace in May, improving his timing and approach at the plate, and he proceeded to total more than 30 home runs between the minors and majors. In fact, his 15 home runs for the Lookouts were enough to rank third in the SL. Sano swings and misses excessively, but he has an idea of how pitchers attack him and takes his share of walks, so he could become an average hitter.

SL observers raved about Sano's "unreal" makeup and enthusiasm for the game. Still, the slugger has limitations. He's a below-average defender at third base who, despite a cannon arm, lacks lateral agility and balance, owing in part to a bulky 260-pound frame that appears larger than it was a season ago.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
241	55	66	18	1	15	48	38	68	5	1	.274	.374	.544

2. BYRON BUXTON OF

CHATTANOOGA (TWINS)

AGE: 21. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-2. WT: 190. DRAFTED: HS—Baxley, Ga., 2012 (1).

In terms of raw tools, Buxton had few peers in the SL. He might have turned in the best performance, too, had the Twins let him develop all year at Chattanooga rather than call him up on June 14.

Singled out by SL managers as the circuit's fastest baserunner, best defensive outfielder and most exciting player, Buxton has all-star potential, which began to manifest in 2015 after a slow start. He eased back into everyday play after an injury-wracked 2014 season to hit .308/.378/.527 over his final 45 games with the Lookouts.

That Buxton began to use his top-of-the-scale speed to take aggressive leads and attempt 22 steals excited managers just as much as his growth at the plate. Buxton shows initiative and works hard to improve his game, but critics point to susceptibility against good sliders and bat drag in his swing that robs him of power. Buxton covers a ton of ground in center field and shows plus arm strength, making him a true five-tool talent.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
237	44	67	7	12	6	37	26	51	20	2	.283	.351	.489

3. ORLANDO ARRIA SS

BILOXI (BREWERS)

AGE: 21. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-0. WT: 165. SIGNED: Venezuela, 2010.

Arria continued to build his case as one of the finest two-way shortstop prospects in the

game in 2015, when he led the SL with 37 doubles and ranked fifth with a .307 average.

Arcia did a better job channeling his aggression into the strike zone this season, when he established career highs in virtually every category. Because he feeds off fastballs, Arcia saw a steady diet of breaking stuff during a summer funk before he adjusted later in the season. He will hit for average in the majors and collect extra bases with his gap power and plus speed. He's not the most patient batter, and his swing gets too big at times, so he probably will be subject to hot and cold streaks.

One of the best defenders among shortstop prospects, Arcia boasts plus range, plus arm strength and fine actions to make every play.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
512	74	157	37	7	8	69	30	73	25	8	.307	.347	.453

4. KYLE SCHWARBER

TENNESSEE (CUBS)

AGE: 22. B-T: L-R. HT: 6-0. WT: 235. DRAFTED: Indiana, 2014 (1).

The Cubs have sent a hard-hitting, first-round position prospect through the SL in each of the past three seasons. Schwarber in 2015 followed the trail blazed by shortstop Javier Baez (2013) and third baseman Kris Bryant (2014). By July, Schwarber had taken up permanent residence as the Cubs' No. 2 hitter, first playing catcher and later left field.

Schwarber draws high grades for his batting skill, projecting as at least an average hitter with plus power and plus on-base ability. He looks for a pitch to drive—never feeling for the ball—and frequently connects for hard contact with plus bat speed through the zone. As with most lefthanded batters, Schwarber can be flummoxed by same-side spin or sliders down-and-in from righthanders.

Evaluators who saw Schwarber catch in the SL gave him little chance to play the position regularly in the majors.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
197	39	63	10	1	13	39	42	49	1	0	.320	.438	.579

5. BLAKE SNELL

MONTGOMERY (RAYS)

AGE: 22. B-T: L-L. HT: 6-4. WT: 180. DRAFTED: HS—Shoreline, Wash., 2011 (15).

Snell began the season as a wild, but tantalizing, lefthander but ended it as the Minor League Player of the Year after ranking as the SL's finest pitching prospect. He marched to a minor league ERA title with an overall mark of 1.41.

Snell throws a plus fastball that sits at 93 mph and can bump 96. That velocity and life allows him to work up in the zone when warranted. His plus changeup is so effective that he can double- and triple-up on the pitch to get back into counts or put batters away. Just as encouragingly, Snell sharpened his breaking ball and incorporated a cutter in 2015 to attack righthanded batters.



Miguel Sano

8. TIM ANDERSON

BIRMINGHAM (WHITE SOX)

AGE: 22. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-1. WT: 185. DRAFTED: East Central (Miss.) CC, 2013 (1).

The White Sox have moved Anderson up the ladder briskly, and he met the challenge at Birmingham in 2015 by leading the SL with 160 hits, 79 runs and 49 stolen bases.

The first things evaluators note about Anderson are his explosive athleticism and double-plus speed. He has one of the quickest swings in the SL and is capable of catching up to any fastball, making him a threat to develop into a .300 hitter. Anderson likes to attack early-count heat, doesn't always recognize breaking-ball spin and seldom works deep counts, so that could limit his on-base ability.

Some scouts believe Anderson's explosive actions, plus range and solid arm will allow him to stay at shortstop. Others didn't care for his spotty fundamentals or arm strength.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
513	79	160	21	12	5	46	24	114	49	13	.312	.350	.429

9. JOSE BERRIOS

RHP CHATTANOOGA (TWINS)

AGE: 21. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-0. WT: 185. DRAFTED: HS—Bayamon, P.R., 2012 (1s).

Berrios led the minors with 175 strikeouts, counting his time at Triple-A Rochester following a promotion, but he had struggled to miss bats at Double-A in 2014.

"You could tell when he was throwing his changeup last year—he telegraphed it a lot," Chattanooga manager Doug Mientkiewicz said. "It's a good pitch, but older hitters pick up on that. Now he throws his changeup with the same arm speed and tempo as his fastball."

Berrios also learned to compete even when losing the handle on his plus 92-95 mph fastball. His changeup grades as at least solid-average, and his slider ranges from fringy to average, giving him a ceiling as a No. 3 starter.

W	L	ERA	G	GS	SV	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	Avg
8	3	3.08	15	15	0	91	77	32	31	6	24	92	.232

10. CODY REED

LHP PENSACOLA (REDS)

AGE: 22. B-T: L-L. HT: 6-5. WT: 220. DRAFTED: Northwest Mississippi CC, 2013 (2/Royals).

SL scouts won't be surprised if Reed turns out to be the best pitcher acquired from the Royals in the Johnny Cueto trade. He pitches at 93 mph and ranges from 91-95 with a heavy fastball that darts all over the zone. He throws an above-average slider that completely befuddles lefthanders, and he also flashes an above-average changeup.

Reed's high-maintenance delivery is difficult to repeat and costs him precision within the zone. Thus scouts view him as anything from a No. 2 starter to a high-leverage reliever.

W	L	ERA	G	GS	SV	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	Avg
6	2	2.17	8	8	0	50	39	14	12	1	16	60	.220

THE SECOND TEN

11. Willson Contreras, c/3b, Tennessee (Cubs).
12. Robert Stephenson, rhp, Pensacola (Reds).
13. Aaron Blair, rhp, Mobile (D-backs).
14. Jorge Polanco, ss/2b, Chattanooga (Twins).
15. Brandon Drury, 2b/3b, Mobile (D-backs).
16. Mallett Smith, of, Mississippi (Braves).
17. Frankie Montas, rhp, Birmingham (White Sox).
18. Jesse Winker, of, Pensacola (Reds).
19. Albert Almora, of, Tennessee (Cubs).
20. Tyrell Jenkins, rhp, Mississippi (Braves).



BY VINCE LARA-CINISOMO

Corpus Christi was by far the best team in the Texas League during the first half, while Midland dominated after the break. Both teams boasted plenty of firepower, with the Hooks fielding first baseman A.J. Reed, who knocked in 46 runs in 53 games after his promotion from high Class A Lancaster, third baseman Colin Moran and the versatile Tony Kemp.

The Hooks didn't lack for pitching, either, not with hard-throwing righthanders Michael Feliz and Joe Musgrove and changeup artist Chris Devenski fronting a rotation that also included 2013 No. 1 overall pick Mark Appel.

The RockHounds boasted an infield that included power threats Matt Olson at first base, Renato Nunez at third base and Chad Pinder at shortstop, and all three made this ranking.

This list would have been even more stout had Springfield's Alex Reyes, the flame-throwing Cardinals farmhand, and Arkansas lefty Sean Newcomb, the Angels' 2014 first-round pick, qualified.

1. JULIO URIAS LHP

TULSA (DODGERS)
AGE: 19. B-T: L-L. HT: 6-2. WT: 205. SIGNED: Mexico, 2012.

The youngest pitcher in Double-A by nearly a year, Urias continued his steady climb to the majors at Tulsa. The only thing that slowed him down was cosmetic surgery to remove a benign tumor from his left eye.

Urias spent about two months on the disabled list in May, June and July as he recovered from surgery. The organization monitored his pitch count, and he did not eclipse 89 pitches in an outing.

At his best, Urias has a fastball that ranges 92-95 mph, and he burnished his control this season, walking a career low 2.0 batters per nine innings at Tulsa.

Urias' changeup showed promise but was inconsistent. He has deception that helps the fastball play up and his curveball flashes plus.

"His fastball command is lacking at times, but he's a competitor," one opposing manager said. "He hides the ball, which adds deception to velocity. He holds runners well. Players with his attitude—they usually don't fail."

W L ERA G GS SV IP H R ER HR BB SO AVG
3 4 2.77 13 13 0 68 53 24 21 4 15 74 .213

2. JOEY GALLO 3B/OF

FRISCO (RANGERS)
AGE: 21. B-T: L-R. HT: 6-5. WT: 230. DRAFTED: HS—Las Vegas, 2012 (1s).

Gallo's power grades at the top of the scale—no minor league hitter has more—and good enough that the Rangers were willing to look beyond an alarming strikeout rate that climbed from 34 percent at Double-A to 40 percent at Triple-A to north of 45 percent in the majors.

Gallo balances the whiffs with his power and by drawing walks, plus he offers the defensive versatility to play either third base or left field. Gallo generates his power with outstanding bat speed, strength, leverage and loft in his lefthanded swing. He's an average runner under way. While swing-and-miss always will be a big part of his game, his hit tool has impressed scouts.

AB R H 2B 3B HR RBI BB SO SB CS AVG OBP SLG
121 21 38 10 1 9 31 24 49 1 0 .314 .425 .636

3. JOSE DE LEON RHP

TULSA (DODGERS)
AGE: 23. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-2. WT: 185. DRAFTED: Southern, 2013 (24).

The Puerto Rico native and former Southern standout got into better shape after the 2013 season and it has put his pro career on a fast track. He leads with a fastball at 93-94 mph with late life, but the refinement of his changeup has elevated his stature.

De Leon's changeup is a plus pitch that

has fade, and he throws the pitch with fastball arm speed. De Leon commands his three-pitch mix well, elevating the heater for strikeouts and throwing a slurvy breaking ball, which flashes solid-averages.

Also key to De Leon's growth is a move to the third-base side of the rubber, which enables him to throw strikes to both sides.

"I was very, very impressed with him," one TL coach said. "Urias is the No. 1 prospect (in the Dodgers system), but (De Leon) could be even better. He has better command, and he gets the swings and misses."

W L ERA G GS SV IP H R ER HR BB SO AVG
2 6 3.64 16 16 1 77 61 35 31 11 29 105 .216

4. TREA TURNER SS

SAN ANTONIO (PADRES)
AGE: 22. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-1. WT: 175. DRAFTED: North Carolina State, 2014 (1).

Turner changed levels, leagues and organizations in 2015—but none of it slowed his bat. Turner hit a composite .322/.370/.458 in 116 games for three minor league clubs to earn a callup to Washington on Aug. 21.

Among his tools, Turner's speed is the most unquestioned, with most scouts putting double-plus grades on his running. His actions at shortstop are solid, but his arm is fringe-average.

Turner has wiry strength, especially in his hands and forearms, and doesn't get overpowered. He has enough bat speed to turn on balls and projects to hit for average power.

"He's a (No. 5 or 6 hitter)," a scout with TL coverage said, "and 10-15 homers is very feasible. He's thin and you think you're going to knock the bat out of his hand, but he just whistles the bat through the zone."

AB R H 2B 3B HR RBI BB SO SB CS AVG OBP SLG
227 31 73 13 3 5 35 24 48 11 4 .322 .385 .471

5. RAULA A. MONDESI SS

NORTHWEST ARKANSAS (ROYALS)

AGE: 20. B-T: B-R. HT: 6-1. WT: 185. SIGNED: Dominican Republic, 2011.

Mondesi, who played most of the season at age 19, already is a frontline defensive player with plus range at shortstop and plus arm strength. He showed solid power and a better feel to hit this season than he had in the past, but the switch-hitter continues to strike out at a high rate (26 percent) for a player who will not hit many homers.

The lithe Mondesi is also a plus runner, which should help him be an average hitter, which he projects to be at this point.

"He just turned 20," the manager said, "so in a year (the hit tool) will be there. He can run, he can bunt, he can drive a ball in the gap or drive the ball the opposite way. He's the most exciting player in this league."

AB R H 2B 3B HR RBI BB SO SB CS AVG OBP SLG
304 36 74 11 5 6 33 17 88 19 6 .243 .279 .372

Dodgers dream on Urias-De Leon duo



Julio Urias

Gomez in Houston.

Phillips tweaked his swing in 2015 to minimize an arm bar that had kept him from turning on inside pitches. He erased some questions about his power by slugging 15 homers in 291 at-bats at high Class A Lancaster in the first half, but scouts say he won't reach that level in the majors.

At this point, Phillips' ultimate ceiling would be a regular center fielder who is a solid-average defender and has average power, a double-plus arm. With his power projection a question mark, though, he might be a better fit in right field because of shaky route-running.

AB R H 2B 3B HR RBI BB SO SB CS AVG OBP SLG
134 22 43 8 4 1 18 8 26 7 2 .321 .372 .463

9. SEAN MANAEA LHP

NORTHWEST ARKANSAS (ROYALS)/MIDLAND (ATHLETICS)

AGE: 23. B-T: R-L. HT: 6-5. WT: 235. DRAFTED: Indiana State, 2013 (1s/Royals).

Traded to Oakland for Ben Zobrist in July, the sturdy-bodied lefthander pitched exceptionally well at Midland, going 6-1, 2.36 and striking out 62 in 50 innings.

From a three-quarters arm slot, Manaea fires a fastball at 90-95 mph with downhill plane and late life. He can bore his fastball in on hitters, while his slider flashes plus and his changeup has shown average potential.

Manaea has below-average command and that is exacerbated when he attempts to alter his slot to add deception. Batters have trouble squaring up Manaea, who has allowed just 10 homers in 196 pro innings.

AB R H 2B 3B HR RBI BB SO SB CS AVG OBP SLG
6 1 2.36 9 9 0 50 43 16 13 4 21 62 .232

10. CHAD PINDER SS

MIDLAND (ATHLETICS)

AGE: 23. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-2. WT: 190. DRAFTED: Virginia Tech, 2013 (2s).

Following the trades of Addison Russell and Daniel Robertson, Pinder assumed regular shortstop duty at Midland in 2015 and enjoyed a terrific season. He won MVP honors in the TL after batting .317/.361/.486. He led all circuit batters with 86 RBIs and 232 total bases and all TL shortstops in assists (267) and double plays (61).

While Pinder lacks the range of Russell or Robertson, he positions himself well and has great instincts. He has a plus arm, but still needs to make footwork adjustments.

Coming out of the draft, Pinder projected to have a bat too light for third base, but he has good raw power and has learned to backspin the ball and drive it out. One coach invoked the name J.J. Hardy discussing Pinder's power and strong arm.

AB R H 2B 3B HR RBI BB SO SB CS AVG OBP SLG
477 71 151 32 2 15 86 28 103 7 5 .317 .361 .486

THE SECOND TEN

- Michael Feliz, rhp, Corpus Christi (Astros).
- Nomar Mazara, of, Frisco (Rangers).
- Hunter Renfroe, of, San Antonio (Padres).
- Jorge Alfaro, c, Frisco (Rangers).
- Kyle Zimmer, rhp, Northwest Arkansas (Royals).
- Jharel Cotton, rhp, Tulsa (Dodgers).
- Jake Thompson, rhp, Frisco (Rangers).
- Matt Olson, 1b/of, Midland (Athletics).
- Renato Nunez, 3b, Midland (Athletics).
- Colin Moran, 3b, Corpus Christi (Astros).

Cal crop favors depth over star power

BY JIM SHONERD

The high Class A California League saw its lowest offensive output in years in 2015, but the league's Top 20 Prospects list is, as usual, still dominated by hitters.

Cal League teams averaged 4.90 runs per game this season. While that figure was still the highest among domestic full-season leagues this year, it was league's lowest output since 1989. Despite the fact that Inland Empire lefthander Sean Newcomb tops the list, hitters occupy seven spots in the Top 10 spots and 13 of the Top 20.

This year's prospect class had a tough act to follow after the blue-chip trio of Carlos Correa, Julio Urias and Corey Seager came through the Cal League in 2014.

1. SEAN NEWCOMB LHP

INLAND EMPIRE (ANGELS)

AGE: 22. B-T: L-L. HT.: 6-5. WT.: 245. DRAFTED: Hartford, 2014 (1).

The 15th overall pick in 2014, Newcomb had no trouble climbing from low Class A Burlington to Double-A Arkansas in 2015, his full-season debut. Opposing Cal League managers got in the habit of sitting their lefty bats when Newcomb started.

The imposing southpaw operates comfortably in the low 90s with his lively fastball and can dial it up to 99 mph. He had a few rocky outings soon after he arrived, in part because he worried too much about pacing himself, but he got on track again once he started airing the ball out more.

Newcomb loves to use his swing-and-miss curveball, but his coaches at Inland forced him to use his changeup more. It's still a work-in-progress. About the only trouble Newcomb encountered came from inconsistent fastball command, for he walked 4.5 batters per nine innings.

W	L	ERA	G	GS	SV	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	Avg
6	1	2.47	13	13	0	66	50	22	18	2	33	84	.207

2. FRANKLIN BARRETO SS

STOCKTON (ATHLETICS)

AGE: 19. B-T: R-R. HT.: 5-9. WT.: 175. SIGNED: Venezuela, 2012 (Blue Jays).

Barreto served as the Cal League's second-youngest everyday player, and one manager compared him with former all-star shortstop Rafael Furcal for his strong, 5-foot-9 frame and quick-twitch athleticism.

Balls jump off Barreto's bat, and he shows quality power for his size. His swing has a few moving parts which can get out of sync, so he worked to simplify things as the year went along and closed a hole he had on the inside part of the plate. For a hitter his age, Barreto demonstrates an impressive willingness to take balls to all fields, and he earns high marks for his instincts on both sides of the ball.

Barreto has the physical tools, including good range and a playable arm, to play the middle infield, though some scouts project him to second base. In any event, his fundamental play at shortstop needs to be shored up after making a league-high 34 errors in 2015.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
338	50	102	22	3	13	47	15	67	8	3	.302	.333	.500

3. A.J. REED 1B

LANCASTER (ASTROS)

AGE: 22. B-T: L-L. HT.: 6-4. WT.: 240. DRAFTED: Kentucky, 2014 (2).

Reed won the Cal League MVP award after batting .346/.449/.638 and leading the circuit in all three triple-slash categories. He finished the year as the minor league leader for homers (34) and OPS (1.044), among other things.

While Lancaster has earned its reputation as a hitter's paradise, Reed hardly needed the bump. One evaluator said he could have double-plus power, and he can pummel balls out to any part of the park. His swing is direct

to the ball with little wasted motion, and he consistently puts together quality at-bats. His knowledge of the strike zone and pitch recognition are advanced, and he takes his walks if pitchers don't throw him strikes.

Cal League observers did not view the hulking Reed as a liability at first base. His range is below-average, but he's athletic enough and has above-average arm strength.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
318	75	110	16	4	23	81	59	73	0	0	.346	.449	.638

4. RYAN MCMAHON 3B

MODESTO (ROCKIES)

AGE: 20. B-T: L-R. HT.: 6-2. WT.: 185. DRAFTED: HS—Santa Ana, Calif., 2013 (2).

McMahon's consistent level of production allowed him to rank first in the Cal League with 43 doubles and fourth with a .372 on-base percentage. He also slammed 18 homers—12 in the second half—despite playing in Modesto, a graveyard by league standards.

McMahon's power is geared mainly to his pull side, and he's at his best when he can extend his arms. This leaves him vulnerable to inside pitches and sets him up for excessive strikeouts. Contact issues aside, he has a good idea at the plate. When opponents shift the infield to defend him, he can take the ball the other way or even bunt.

Managers liked McMahon's savvy and gamer mentality. A good athlete with a solid arm at third base, he needs to clean up his footwork, a major culprit to his league-leading 39 errors at the hot corner.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
496	85	149	43	6	18	75	49	153	6	13	.300	.372	.520

5. ALEX BREGMAN SS

LANCASTER (ASTROS)

AGE: 21. B-T: R-R. HT.: 6-0. WT.: 180. DRAFTED: Louisiana State, 2015 (1).

The Astros fast-tracked the No. 2 overall pick in this year's draft to Lancaster after just 29 pro games, and he immediately took on a central role. Even though Bregman hit in the Cal League, the first thing evaluators talked about is his defense. He's a fluid shortstop whose attention to detail and preparation set him apart. He doesn't have a cannon arm, but it's solid.

Bregman's polish extends to his offensive game, where he settled in as the JetHawks' No. 2 hitter down the stretch. He can turn on inside pitch for power, mainly to his pull side, but he profiles as a top-of-the-order bat with his flat swing path and good contact ability. He's not a plus runner, though he's fast and instinctive enough to be a threat on the bases.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
160	19	51	8	4	3	21	12	17	8	4	.319	.364	.475

6. ANTONIO SENZATELA RHP

MODESTO (ROCKIES)

AGE: 20. B-T: R-R. HT.: 6-1. WT.: 180. SIGNED: Venezuela, 2011.

Senzatela never allowed more than four



Sean Newcomb

54 Double-A games after moving up—his bat nonetheless should play as a top-of-the-order threat.

Phillips has a good knowledge of the strike zone and a quick, level swing. Like most young hitters, he can get in trouble when he stays in pull mode, but he does also show an ability to hang in against lefthanders and play the short game.

Phillips has the range to play center field and an accurate, above-average arm, so he could fit defensively in any of the three outfield spots.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
291	68	93	19	7	15	53	22	64	8	6	.320	.379	.588

9. CHRIS ELLIS RHP

INLAND EMPIRE (ANGELS)

AGE: 22. B-T: R-R. HT.: 6-4. WT.: 190. DRAFTED: Mississippi, 2014 (3).

Ellis led the Cal League with 70 strikeouts at the time the Angels promoted him to Double-A Arkansas in early June. He's a polished college righthander who mastered the biggest key to succeeding in the unforgiving Cal League—keeping the ball down. Ellis pounds the lower half of the zone, and both sides of the plate, with fastballs that range 92-94 mph.

Ellis' projectable slider has nice shape and late bite when he's got it going well, though it was inconsistent at times with Inland. His changeup is fringy but also has the makings of a third average pitch. He's got an athletic build and an easy delivery, which is key to his strike-throwing ability.

W	L	ERA	G	GS	SV	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	Avg
9	9	2.51	26	26	0	154	131	53	43	10	33	143	.229

7. LEWIS BRINSON OF

HIGH DESERT (RANGERS)

AGE: 21. B-T: R-R. HT.: 6-3. WT.: 170. DRAFTED: HS—Coral Springs, Fla., 2012 (1).

Brinson got off to a middling start before going down with a hamstring injury in late April that shelved him for the month of May. When he came back, he was a different hitter.

Brinson has come a long way from the raw high schooler who struck out 191 times in 2013. His post-injury hot streak coincided with cutting down the leg kick in his swing and sharpening his plate discipline. As he got comfortable with his timing, he consistently hit balls hard and his confidence grew.

Brinson performed at hitter-happy High Desert, of course, but he also logged a similar 1.047 OPS in road games. He has the potential to keep hitting for above-average power as he moves up, and he has the speed and strong throwing arm to handle center field, though his routes and angles need more polish.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
258	51	87	22	7	13	42	31	64	13	6	.337	.416	.628

8. BRETT PHILLIPS OF

LANCASTER (ASTROS)

AGE: 21. B-T: L-R. HT.: 6-0. WT.: 180. DRAFTED: HS—Seminole, Fla., 2012 (6).

While Lancaster teammate A.J. Reed was slugging home runs, Phillips was setting the table as the leadoff man while also standing out as one of the Cal League's more complete players. He ranked third in the league in OPS at the time he moved to Double-A Corpus Christi at midseason. The Astros then dealt him to the Brewers for Carlos Gomez and Mike Fiers in a July trade.

While Phillips' power production received a Lancaster bump—he homered only once in

W	L	ERA	G	GS	SV	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
150	21	48	12	0	4	26	11	20	1	1	320	372	.480			

THE SECOND TEN

11. Christian Arroyo, ss, San Jose (Giants).
12. Matt Chapman, 3b, Stockton (Athletics).
13. Cody Bellinger, 1b/of, Rancho Cucamonga (Dodgers).
14. Zack Godley, rhp, Visalia (D-backs).
15. Ryan Cordell, of/3b, High Desert (Rangers).
16. Tyler Beede, rhp, San Jose (Giants).
17. Raimel Tapia, of, Modesto (Rockies).
18. Keury Mella, rhp, San Jose (Giants).
19. Tyler O'Neill, of, Bakersfield (Mariners).
20. Ryan Yarbrough, lhp, Bakersfield (Mariners).



Giolito stands out in talented Carolina

BY JOSH NORRIS

The Carolina League this season featured a handful of tantalizing prospects. Potomac right-hander Lucas Giolito is the game's best pitching prospect, and the three weeks he spent in extended spring training to start the year did nothing to change that status. Lynchburg's Bradley Zimmer and Salem's Manuel Margot add a pair of potential five-tool center fielders to the league, and Potomac righty Reynaldo Lopez, Wilmington lefty Cody Reed and Potomac righty Nick Pivetta add a trio of high-upside, if unrefined, arms.

The bottom portion of the list is filled with players who are either young for the level or have upside but lack a carrying tool. Winston-Salem outfielder Adam Engel has speed, defense and a hint of power, but he hasn't shown a feel to hit. Frederick catcher Chance Sisco has a high-end bat, but might not have the chops to stick behind the plate. Myrtle Beach outfielder Mark Zagunis has the league's most discerning eye, but lacks the present power to profile on an outfield corner.

1. LUCAS GIOLITO RHP

POTOMAC (NATIONALS)

AGE: 21. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-6. WT: 255. DRAFTED: HS—Studio

City, Calif., 2012 (1).

After a three-week stint in extended spring training to start the year, Giolito joined Potomac and quickly made up for lost time. His stuff, especially his fastball and curveball, is unquestioned.

Giolito's heater, which can sit in the mid-90s and peak in the uppers, grades at minimum a 70 on the 20-80 scouting scale. His curveball, a vicious downer, rarely is graded below a 60. His changeup shows promise, too. When thrown right it has late sink and fade, but when it's overthrown it becomes a batting-practice fastball.

Giolito presents a few blemishes for scouts, however. He does need to work to repeat his delivery and stay square with his catcher. The command of his arsenal, particularly his fastball, needs refinement as well. These are all minor dings, however, and Giolito looks every bit of a future frontline starter.

W	L	ERA	G	GS	SV	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	Avg
3	5	2.71	13	11	0	70	65	24	21	1	20	86	.244

package. He's a true center fielder who uses plus speed to create easy range to both sides and has an above-average arm to boot.

At the plate, Margot draws comparisons with current Red Sox center fielder Mookie Betts because of the way his bat stays in the hitting zone for an extended time. He doesn't have Betts' power, but scouts project 10-12 homers for Margot as he learns to pick the pitches to drive. Promoted to Double-A Portland at the halfway point, Margot has a chance for five average-or-better tools, depending on how his power projections turn out.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
501	88	143	36	3	16	72	68	125	15	7	.285	.377	.465
181	35	51	6	5	3	17	11	15	20	5	.282	.321	.420

4. REYNALDO LOPEZ RHP

POTOMAC (NATIONALS)

AGE: 21. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-0. WT: 185. SIGNED: Dominican Republic, 2012.

Along with Lucas Giolito, Lopez stands as one of the Nationals' two prized pitching prospects.

Even though Lopez stands in at just 6 feet, scouts see several indicators he can remain in the rotation. First, he holds the velocity on his mid- to upper-90s fastball, a pitch which also features armside run, deep into games. He also sports a curve that showed a bit of inconsistency this year but was above-average when it clicked. His changeup, too, is coming along, and he throws the pitch with the same arm speed as his fastball.

Lopez's delivery features effort, as would be expected, but his arm action is loose. Those who believe in him see a Carlos Martinez-type of pitcher if everything clicks. He does need to iron out command in the strike zone—he allowed opponents to hit .252 against him—and work toward continued refinement of his secondary pitches.

W	L	ERA	G	GS	SV	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	Avg
6	7	4.09	19	19	0	99	93	47	45	5	28	94	.252

5. CLINT FRAZIER OF

LYNCHBURG (INDIANS)

AGE: 21. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-1. WT: 190. DRAFTED: HS—Loganville, Ga., 2013 (1).

Slowly but surely, Frazier's tools are translating into skills. BA's 2013 High School Player of the Year produced erratic results in his full-season debut at low Class A Lake County in 2014 before rebounding this season.

Frazier's top-of-the-scale bat speed helped him rank among the Carolina League leaders with a .285 average (fourth), 16 home runs (second) and 72 RBIs (third), while leading the circuit with 143 hits, 36 doubles and 55 extra-base hits. He also showed a disciplined approach with the third-most walks (68). His swing features a bit of a hand hitch, but his bat speed more than compensates.

Frazier split time between center and right field with 2014 first-rounder Bradley Zimmer

2. BRADLEY ZIMMER OF

LYNCHBURG (INDIANS)

AGE: 22. B-T: L-R. HT: 6-4. WT: 185. DRAFTED: San Francisco, 2014 (1).

Before moving up to Double-A Akron on July 16, Zimmer shared the center field position at Lynchburg with Clint Frazier, the Indians' first-round pick in 2013, the year before they selected Zimmer 21st overall. Of the two, Zimmer drew more plaudits.

As a center fielder, Zimmer covers ground with long strides that belie his bigger frame, and he boasts an average arm at the position. Even though he's not a burner by any means, his polished instincts on the bases allowed him to steal 32 bags in 37 chances in the Carolina League.

At the plate, Zimmer has quick hands and above-average power to all fields. Based on his tool set, he could grow to become a 20 homer-20 steal player if he reaches his peak.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
286	60	88	17	3	10	39	37	77	32	5	.308	.403	.493

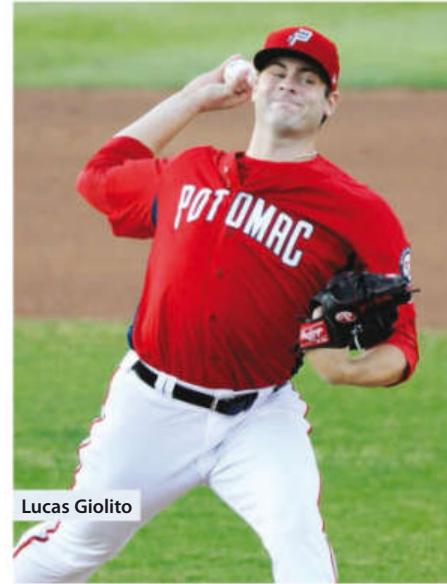
3. MANUEL MARGOT OF

SALEM (RED SOX)

AGE: 20. B-T: R-R. HT: 5-11. WT: 170. SIGNED: Dominican Republic, 2011.

After a late-season promotion to Salem in 2014, Margot set a goal for 2015 in his return to the Carolina League: He wanted to reduce his strikeout rate. The result? He was the last pro player to whiff this season, the first time coming on April 29.

Even so, evaluators saw a bit of aggression to be toned down in Margot's approach, though it's a blip on an otherwise enticing



British Columbia, Pivetta pitched effectively at Potomac through early July, but a promotion to Double-A Harrisburg and subsequent trade to the Phillies (for Jonathan Papelbon) resulted in a 7.27 ERA, with the poor peripherals to match, in 10 starts.

Pivetta begins his four-pitch mix with a mid-90s fastball that has tremendous sink and downhill plane. He couples it with a high-70s curveball and a low-80s slider, the latter of which ranks as the better breaker. He also throws a changeup that shows fade and sink but lacks consistency.

W	L	ERA	G	GS	SV	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	Avg
7	4	2.29	15	14	0	86	70	29	22	4	29	72	.225

9. SAM TRAVIS

1B

SALEM (RED SOX)

AGE: 22. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-0. WT: 195. DRAFTED: Indiana, 2014 (2).

An athletic first baseman with a keen command of the strike zone and plenty of patience, Travis drew plenty of compliments from managers around the league. The one question right now is whether he'll have enough power to profile at first base. He hit just nine home runs across to two levels this season, including four at Double-A Portland in the second half.

Nobody questions whether Travis possesses the strength to mash homers, but scouts are split as to whether his output will be closer to 10 or 20 home runs annually when he finishes developing. He has quick feet around the bag and a strong arm, making him an average defender at first base.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
246	35	77	15	4	5	40	26	43	10	6	.313	.378	.467

10. CHANCE SISCO

C

FREDERICK (ORIOLES)

AGE: 20. B-T: L-R. HT: 6-2. WT: 193. DRAFTED: HS—Corona, Calif., 2013 (2).

Nearly everybody agrees that Sisco's future is an offensive player. He uses plus hands to fuel great bat-to-ball skills from a short, compact, lefthanded stroke with a slight uppercut.

Sisco shows plenty of power to his pull side, but some evaluators also see a bit of pop the other way. He also has a keen knowledge of the strike zone, as shown by his low strikeout rate (14 percent) and high walk rate (11 percent) just two years out of high school.

Defensively, Sisco needs to improve. He does a better job keeping the ball in the strike zone when he receives it, but still has a tendency to box up a ball now and again. He's got a strong arm as well, but his mechanics lead to throws that tail high and to his arm side. After finishing the season at Double-A Bowie at age 20, he's got plenty of time to work.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
263	30	81	12	3	4	26	33	41	8	1	.308	.387	.422

THE SECOND TEN

- Trey Michalczewski, 3b, Winston-Salem (White Sox).
- Adam Plutko, rhp, Lynchburg (Indians).
- Jeimer Candelario, 3b, Myrtle Beach (Cubs).
- Adam Engel, of, Winston-Salem (White Sox).
- Mark Zagunis, of, Myrtle Beach (Cubs).
- Trey Mancini, 1b, Frederick (Orioles).
- Nellie Rodriguez, 1b, Lynchburg (Indians).
- Dustin Peterson, of, Carolina (Braves).
- Wendell Rijo, 2b, Salem (Red Sox).
- Austen Williams, rhp, Potomac (Nationals).



Reyes brings closer stuff in starter role

BY JOHN MANUEL

No single player dominated the high Class A Florida State League this year. No batter exceeded 14 home runs; no pitcher surpassed 12 wins or 150 strikeouts. Yet the FSL had its share of standout performers.

Few FSL pitchers have flashed the pure stuff of Palm Beach righthander Alex Reyes, whom numerous scouts and managers referred to as having closer-quality dominant velocity and swing-and-miss stuff, but over five or six innings as a time.

Reyes led the way in a Top 20 that was heavier on position players than usual for the pitcher-friendly league. Like most of the league's top prospects, he didn't stick around all year and headed to Double-A Springfield at midseason. Without him, Palm Beach lost both of its playoff games to Charlotte, as the Stone Crabs swept through the playoffs despite their own attrition.

1. ALEX REYES RHP

PALM BEACH (CARDINALS)

AGE: 21. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-3. WT: 185. SIGNED: Dominican Republic, 2012.

Reyes has garnered buzz since moving from New Jersey to the Dominican Republic and signing in December 2012 for \$950,000. He's lived up to the hype thus far when healthy, dominating the FSL to earn comparisons to pitchers such as Dellin Betances and Dwight Gooden for his deadly stuff. Reyes' fastball sat at 96-97 mph for the duration of most of his Palm Beach outings, and he regularly reached 100 mph and topped out at 102.

Reyes backed that up with a power 12-to-6 curveball with tight spin, as well as a changeup that scrapes 90 mph and has solid action. His stuff is so good that he struggles to command it—he walked 4.4 per nine innings—despite a fairly clean delivery and minimal effort. Two scouts and multiple managers said they didn't see a red flag that should preclude Reyes from throwing strikes in the future.

"He had some command issues, but barring injury, he's going to be a superstar," said Bradenton's Mike Ryan, whose big league career ended in 2010. "I know I never faced a starter with that kind of stuff."

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
508	72	156	22	4	7	54	41	79	20	7	.306	.357	.407

2. MICHAEL CONFORTO OF

ST. LUCIE (METS)

AGE: 22. B-T: L-R. HT: 6-1. WT: 215. DRAFTED: Oregon State, 2014 (1).

Conforto and the Cubs' Kyle Schwarber ranked as the top college bats available for the 2014 draft, and both have zoomed to the major leagues as key lineup pieces for contending teams in 2015. Schwarber streaked through the FSL last year; Conforto did it in the first half of 2015, leading the league with six intentional walks in just 46 games.

Conforto intimidated opposing managers and pitchers alike with a balanced, strong swing that is short to the zone and long through it. He covers the plate and doesn't get cheated, yet keeps his swing under control, using his hands well. Conforto has improved defensively as a pro and has solid arm strength but likely is limited to left field.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
184	25	52	12	0	7	28	17	26	0	1	.283	.350	.462

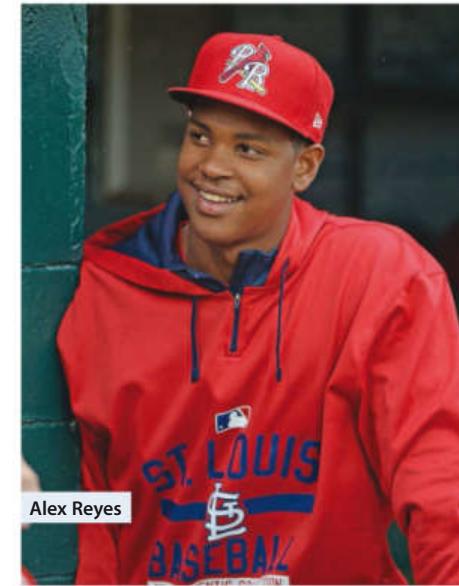
3. AUSTIN MEADOWS OF

BRADENTON (PIRATES)

AGE: 20. B-T: L-R. HT: 6-3. WT: 200. DRAFTED: HS—Loganville, Ga., 2013 (1).

Meadows missed much of 2014 with hamstring problems, so the fact that he stayed healthy and logged 121 games at Bradenton would alone merit a positive review. Throw in leading the FSL in hits (156) and total bases (207) while ranking third in batting (.306) and Meadows had a spectacular season, despite modest power numbers.

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strikeouts (133) and third in opponent average (.230). He led the field with 8.5 strikeouts per nine innings. While Garrett is old for the league thanks to his two-sport background, he has put college basketball in his rear-view and has become an elite pitching prospect.

Garrett has ideal size and athleticism to go with arm strength and looseness. Both his fastball, which can sit 94-96 mph for stretches, and power breaking ball (alternately called a curve and slider), elicit swings and misses, with his breaking ball making strides this season and earning plus grades from two scouts.

Garrett has a high-octane delivery and never will have plus command. His changeup remains a fringe-average third pitch. He has improved his ability to hold runners and quickening his times to home plate.

W	L	ERA	G	GS	SV	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	Avg
9	7	2.44	26	26	0	140	117	50	38	4	55	133	.230

9. BRENT HONEYWELL RHP

CHARLOTTE (RAYS)

AGE: 20. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-2. WT: 180. DRAFTED: Walters State (Tenn.) CC, 2014 (2s).

Honeywell has gained notoriety for throwing a screwball, and as a nephew of 1974 Cy Young Award winner Mike Marshall, who threw the pitch, it makes some sense. Scouts and managers say it's a plus pitch, as much for the element of surprise as for its action.

However, Honeywell would be a prospect without it. He's athletic and loose-armed, with an above-average fastball that reaches 94 mph and jumps out of his hand with good life. His curveball gives him a second above-average offering, and his changeup flashes above-average as well. Best of all, Honeywell has above-average control of all his pitches and may have true plus command when he reaches his ceiling, thanks to his easy arm action, good feel and athleticism.

W	L	ERA	G	GS	SV	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	Avg
5	2	3.44	12	12	0	65	57	26	25	2	15	53	.235

10. JAKE BAUERS 1B

CHARLOTTE (RAYS)

AGE: 19. B-T: L-L. HT: 6-1. WT: 195. DRAFTED: HS—Huntington Beach, Calif., 2013 (7/Padres).

Bauers enraptured scouts and league managers as the league's most polished offensive player after Conforto and Meadows. He belies his age with his polished plate approach, calmness in the batter's box and ability to cover the plate. Bauers didn't skip a beat after a promotion from Double-A Montgomery.

Bauers repeats his simple swing, barrels up balls and uses the whole field, stinging line drives to the gaps and making for a very tough out. He's an excellent defender at first base as well, and when big leaguer James Loney showed up on a rehab assignment with Charlotte, scouts had their comp.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
217	33	58	14	2	6	38	29	33	2	3	.267	.357	.433

THE SECOND TEN

11. Reese McGuire, c, Bradenton (Pirates).
12. Harold Ramirez, of, Bradenton (Pirates).
13. Alex Blandino, ss/2b, Daytona (Reds).
14. Dominic Smith, 1b, St Lucie (Mets).
15. Kohl Stewart, rhp, Fort Myers (Twins).
16. Stephen Gonsalves, lhp, Fort Myers (Twins).
17. Luke Weaver, rhp, Palm Beach (Cardinals).
18. Tyler Wade, ss/2b, Tampa (Yankees).
19. Engelb Vielma, ss, Fort Myers (Twins).
20. JaCoby Jones, ss, Bradenton (Pirates).



Torres' well-rounded skills wow scouts

BY J.J. COOPER

West Michigan may have won the low Class A Midwest League title, but few would argue that Quad Cities will be the 2015 MWL team to remember. For five months, the River Bandits dominated the league. They went 88-50 and finished with the highest winning percentage (.638) of any full-season minor league team.

Quad Cities did it with a revolving cast of players, and all told more than 60 different players wore a Bandits uniform in 2015. By the end of the year, a number of Astros prospects had been promoted to higher levels. Others like catcher Jacob Nottingham and righthander Daniel Mengden had been traded away at the deadline.

But Quad Cities just kept winning. It didn't hurt that the reinforcements were often just as talented as the players who had moved on. Scouts who saw the River Bandits all year said that the team had nearly 20 legitimate prospects.

1. GLEYBER TORRES

SS

SOUTH BEND (CUBS)

AGE: 18. **B-T:** R-R. **HT.:** 6-1. **WT.:** 175. **SIGNED:** Venezuela, 2013.

Torres was one of the youngest players in the MWL and also one of the best. The 18-year-old was a steady performer both defensively and offensively. His above-average arm is his best asset defensively, for it allows him to make plays in the hole and position himself a little deeper than most shortstops, which alleviates some of the concerns about his ordinary range.

At the plate, Torres wears out the opposite-field gap but he also has the power to pull the ball over the left-field wall, though he does it very rarely.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
386	58	110	12	4	9	49	29	68	15	14	.285	.335	.407

advanced internal clock. He has an above-average arm but rarely has to use it because he has an excellent understanding of just how much time he has to throw.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
386	58	110	12	4	9	49	29	68	15	14	.285	.335	.407

4. NICK GORDON

SS

CEDAR RAPIDS (TWINS)

AGE: 19. **B-T:** L-R. **HT.:** 6-0. **WT.:** 160. **DRAFTED:** HS—Orlando, 2014 (1).

As the MWL chewed up and spit out several prominent 2014 high school draft picks—including the Mariners' Alex Jackson and the Brewers' duo of Monte Harrison and Jake Gatewood—Gordon never looked to be over his head and kept getting better as the season progressed. For example, he hit .302/.347/.416 after the all-star break.

Gordon became less mechanical and smoother in the field as the season progressed, and he showed defensive reliability by leading MWL shortstops with a .966 fielding average. Gordon has good hands and an above-average arm. Though he's only an average runner out of the box, Gordon is a solid basestealer.

Gordon showed similar development on offense. Blessed with excellent hand-eye coordination, he was too aggressive early in the season, especially if he got ahead in the count. He began to figure out how to wait out early-count breaking balls and stop going after pitches out of the zone.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
481	79	133	23	7	1	58	39	88	25	8	.277	.336	.360

5. FRANCIS MARTES

RHP

QUAD CITIES (ASTROS)

AGE: 19. **B-T:** R-R. **HT.:** 6-1. **WT.:** 225. **SIGNED:** Dominican Republic, 2012 (Marlins).

The Astros overwhelmed the MWL with multiple waves of outstanding pitchers. Even while using 37 different hurlers, Quad Cities posted a league-best 2.65 ERA. Acquired from the Marlins in last July's Jarred Cosart deal, Martes impressed scouts and managers with two plus pitches, evoking comparisons to Lance McCullers Jr. because he throws a 93-95 mph fastball and a power curveball that combines slider speed (83-85) with a curve's downward tilt.

McCullers lacked a quality changeup when he pitched in the MWL, and the same is true with Martes. However, Martes' control and command is significantly more advanced at the same stage in his development.

W	L	ERA	G	GS	SV	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	Avg
4	4	2.91	12	12	0	65	53	27	21	3	12	76	.221

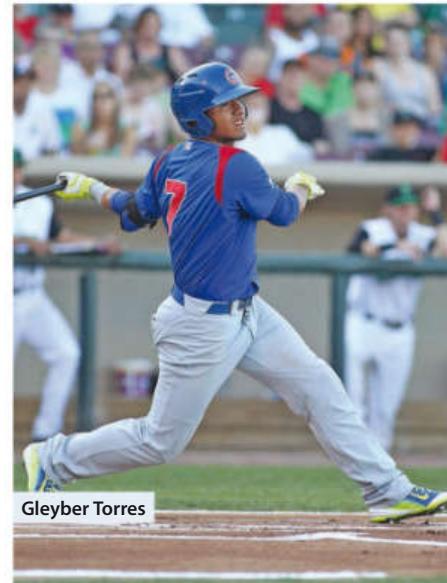
6. IAN HAPP

OF

SOUTH BEND (CUBS)

AGE: 21. **B-T:** B-R. **HT.:** 6-0. **WT.:** 205. **DRAFTED:** Cincinnati, 2015 (1).

One of the best college hitters available in



Gleyber Torres

that gives it more of a slider appearance in the low 80s.

Holmes' 93-94 mph fastball gives him a potential second plus pitch, though he has to develop the pitch. He has worked to clean up his delivery and tone down the recoil in his finish, but he still struggles to get the ball down in the strike zone. As a shorter (6-foot-1) righthander with a low three-quarters arm slot, Holmes will have to have plenty of fastball life to survive up in the zone.

W	L	ERA	G	GS	SV	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	Avg
6	4	3.14	24	24	0	103	86	46	36	6	54	117	.229

9. BOBBY BRADLEY

1B

LAKE COUNTY (INDIANS)

AGE: 19. **B-T:** L-R. **HT.:** 6-1. **WT.:** 225. **DRAFTED:** HS—Gulfport, Miss., 2014 (3).

The MWL is a tough place for most players to hit home runs, and four different teams this year failed to compile 50 as a team. Bradley, despite missing 20 games with an oblique injury, put on a season-long power show. His 27 home runs were 11 more than anyone else in the MWL and the fifth most by a teenager in the league's modern-day history.

Bradley's follow-up to his 2014 triple crown in the Rookie-level Arizona League included a whole lot of power, an amazing 11-home run August and plenty of miscues as well. He struck out in 32 percent of his plate appearances and has to improve his contact ability, but some scouts see a future fringe-average hitter once Bradley learns trust his hands more and use the entire field. .

At first base, Bradley showed inexperience as he learns the position. His 17 errors ranked first among MWL first basemen.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
401	62	108	15	4	27	92	56	148	3	0	.269	.361	.529

10. SEAN REID-FOLEY

RHP

LANSING (BLUE JAYS)

AGE: 20. **B-T:** R-R. **HT.:** 6-3. **WT.:** 220. **DRAFTED:** HS—Jacksonville, 2014 (2).

In a game now dripping with velocity, Reid-Foley throws hard enough to get noticed. It's not just that he sits 93-95 mph and touches 98, it's that he does it with such an easy delivery that looks like he's just getting loose.

For a pitcher who walked 6.1 batters per nine innings in the MWL, Reid-Foley's control is not as bad as the numbers indicate. He will locate within the strike zone for innings at a time, but he has not yet developed the ability to self-diagnose and correct flaws. When he loses his timing, he tends to walk batters in bunches.

Reid-Foley has a stout lower half and easy delivery that should make him durable. His slider flashes above-average potential but is inconsistent, and his changeup is fringy.

W	L	ERA	G	GS	SV	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	Avg
3	5	3.69	17	17	0	63	57	33	26	3	43	90	.239

THE SECOND TEN

11. Justus Sheffield, 1b, Lake County Indians.
12. Jacob Nottingham, c, Quad Cities (Astros).
13. Harrison Bader, of, Peoria (Cardinals).
14. Casey Gillaspie, 1b, Bowling Green (Rays).
15. Jesus Tinoco, rhp, Lansing (Blue Jays).
16. Kodi Medeiros, lhp, Wisconsin (Brewers).
17. Spencer Turnbull, rhp, West Michigan (Tigers).
18. Stephen Gonsalves, lhp, Cedar Rapids (Twins).
19. Yairo Munoz, ss, Beloit (Athletics).
20. Paul DeJong, 3b, Peoria (Cardinals).

3. RUDY GIRON

SS

FORT WAYNE (PADRES)

AGE: 18. **B-T:** R-R. **HT.:** 5-11. **WT.:** 175. **SIGNED:** Dominican Republic, 2013.

The Padres held Giron behind in extended spring training for the first six weeks of the season, but once he joined Fort Wayne he went 6-for-6 in his MWL debut.

Giron never stopped hitting after that. In a league brimming with talented shortstop prospects, his combination of bat speed and present strength made him one of the easier prospects to project as an above-average hitter, especially in light of his short, direct bat path. Giron has some present pull power and should wind up hitting 10-12 home runs a year, but his swing is geared more for hitting line drives.

What impressed scouts the most was Giron's



Middle infielders dominate weak SAL

BY J.J. COOPER

Much like farmers tending their fields, managers and coaches work with what they are given. Some years it rains a lot, while other years see drought conditions.

In some years, ranking just 20 prospects in the low Class A South Atlantic League seems restrictive. With 14 teams, the league often contains too many quality prospects to rank.

This is not one of those years. Scouts and managers came away less impressed with SAL talent this year than that of any recent year.

Greenville fielded a loaded lineup that featured four of the top 10 prospects in the league, and plenty of shortstops littered SAL rosters, but when it came to pitching, the league was lacking. Some of the pitchers with top-of-the-scale fastballs, such as Greensboro's Tyler Kolek, Rome's Touki Toussaint and Greenville's Michael Kopech, need to develop their control and secondary pitches. Those with solid feel and secondary offerings, such as Kannapolis' Spencer Adams and Jordan Guerrero, didn't have above-average velocity.

1. YOAN MONCADA

2B

GREENVILLE (RED SOX)

AGE: 20. B-T: B-R. HT: 6-2. WT: 205. SIGNED: Cuba, 2015.

For the first two months of the SAL season, Moncada left scouts scratching their heads. He missed hittable pitches, took inconsistent routes to groundballs at second base and looked a little lost. But near the all-star break, Moncada shook off the rust, regained his timing and became the best player in the league.

Moncada has quick hands and a swing geared for driving line drives from gap to gap from both sides of the plate. He projects as an above-average hitter with average power. Evaluators see him as a doubles hitter whose bat speed and strength will let him run into 10-15 home runs, though there's a chance for more if he's willing to sacrifice batting average.

Moncada also was one of the SAL's best baserunners with aggressiveness and feel to go with double-plus speed. League catchers threw him out just three times in 52 tries, including twice at third base and once at home—but never at second base.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
394	64	122	21	8	0	37	36	56	29	8	.310	.368	.404

2. JORGE MATEO

SS

CHARLESTON (YANKEES)

AGE: 20. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-0. WT: 188. SIGNED: Dominican Republic, 2012.

Mateo has tools to rival the league's No. 1 prospect Yoan Moncada. Mateo is just as fast, just as prolific at stealing bases, has similar power potential and a better arm. Plus, he is a potentially above-average defender at shortstop.

Moncada ranks higher because he has a better chance to be an above-average hitter, thanks in part to a better approach, but Mateo is a well-rounded prospect who could end up making an impact both offensively and defensively.

Mateo's baserunning ability combined with his speed makes him a pest once he reaches. He led the league with 71 steals, then added 11 more at high Class A Tampa to lead the minors with 82. .

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
343	64	121	23	3	15	68	30	112	7	9	.279	.329	.449

3. OZZIE ALBIES

SS

ROME (BRAVES)

AGE: 18. B-T: B-R. HT: 5-9. WT: 150. SIGNED: Curacao, 2013.

In a league filled with quality middle infielders, including the top two prospects, some evaluators believe Albies has the brightest future. The switch-hitter has exceptional bat control from both sides of the plate, combined with excellent hand-eye coordination. He's a career .328 hitter in his young career, and he finished fourth in the SAL

batting race (.310).

Albies, who missed the final month with a broken thumb, has only one pro home run, and power will never be a significant part of his game. He has the strength to line the ball to the gaps, but projects as a quick-twitch leadoff hitter. Albies has double-plus speed and an above-average arm, but it's his understanding of the game and feel defensively that impresses even more.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
394	64	122	21	8	0	37	36	56	29	8	.310	.368	.404

4. JAVIER GUERRA

SS

GREENVILLE (RED SOX)

AGE: 19. B-T: L-R. HT: 5-11. WT: 155. SIGNED: Panama, 2012.

Ozzie Albies and Jorge Mateo are both potentially above-average defenders, but Guerra is the shortstop who makes the hard play look easy. Almost by acclamation, he was considered the best defender in the league.

Guerra is a below-average runner who still manages to be a plus defender thanks to an excellent first step, great feet and some of the best hands in the minors. He has a well above-average arm as well, but he receives criticism from some quarters for committing errors while trying to make the impossible play, rather than putting the ball in his pocket.

No one expected to see Guerra hit 15 home runs this year, and most evaluators see him as a future 5-10 home run hitter, but he has shown the ability to ambush fastballs when he gets into favorable counts. His plate discipline took a step forward this year, and his hard contact rate followed suit.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
434	64	121	23	3	15	68	30	112	7	9	.279	.329	.449

5. RAFAEL DEVERS

3B

GREENVILLE (RED SOX)

AGE: 18. B-T: L-R. HT: 6-0. WT: 190. SIGNED: Dominican Republic, 2013.

Devers' raw statistics aren't as impressive as some other players in the SAL, but when you consider his age, his loose swing and hand-eye coordination, he projects to be one of the best hitters from this year's class.

Devers keeps the barrel of his bat in the hitting zone for a long time, although he has a bat wrap. He has a middle-of-the-field approach that produced 38 doubles and 50 extra-base hits that ranked second and third in the SAL. While Devers appears to take a ferocious lefthanded rip, he manages to stay balanced. He has plus raw power that should grow into more consistent home run output.

Devers has wide hips that lead to concerns of future weight gain, but he has the body control, infield actions and light feet to stay at third base.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
469	71	135	38	1	11	70	24	84	3	2	.288	.329	.443



Yoan Moncada

in the league.

Davidson uses the whole field, has a clear plan at the plate and is starting to tap into his plus raw power. He's going to strike out (27 percent of the time this year) but also gets on base thanks to plenty of walks (17 percent).

Davidson moved from left field to right this year. He has improved to become a potentially average defender with an average arm. As advanced as his approach is at the plate, he is less savvy on the bases, where he was thrown out six times in seven steal attempts.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
401	51	97	23	0	10	45	84	135	1	6	.242	.381	.374

9. YEUDY GARCIA

RHP

WEST VIRGINIA (PIRATES)

AGE: 22. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-3. WT: 185. SIGNED: Dominican Republic, 2013.

While most top prospects from the Dominican Republic sign when they are 16 or 17 years old, teams can sometimes find a bargain by signing older players who develop later. Garcia is the rare 20-year-old signee who has blossomed into a prospect.

Garcia ended up leading the SAL in ERA (2.10) and ranked second in opponent average (.204).

Evaluators loved Garcia's demeanor and work ethic. His calling card is a 93-96 mph fastball that plays up in shorter stints. The pitch has good life and generates swings and misses. His slider is less consistent but also flashes above-average potential on a regular basis. His arsenal really plays against right-handers, who hit just .188 with one home run against him.

W

W	L	ERA	G	GS	SV	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	Avg
12	5	2.1	30	21	1	124	92	36	29	4	41	112	.204

10. MICHAEL KOPECH

RHP

GREENVILLE (RED SOX)

AGE: 19. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-3. WT: 205. DRAFTED: HS—Mount Pleasant, Texas, 2014 (1).

No one in the SAL threw harder than Kopech. The righthander sat at 95-97 mph and touched triple-digits. His slider, changeup and control are much farther away, but Kopech's fastball was good enough that he could effectively take two turns through the lineup even when he lacked a second usable pitch.

Kopech does a better job of repeating his mechanics, even though his long arms and legs create more checkpoints. He especially struggles to command his two-seam fastball.

Kopech's slider has flashed above-average potential, but only infrequently. His well below-average changeup lacks deception and separation. His season came to an end in mid-July when he picked up a 50-game suspension after testing positive for the stimulant Oxilofrine.

W	L	ERA	G	GS	SV	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	Avg
4	5	2.63	16	15	0	65	53	25	19	2	27	70	.228

THE SECOND TEN

11. Ariel Jurado, rhp, Hickory (Rangers).
12. Jairo Beras, of, Hickory (Rangers).
13. Jomar Reyes, 3b, Delmarva (Orioles).
14. Malquin Canelo, ss, Lakewood (Phillies).
15. Cole Tucker, ss, West Virginia (Pirates).
16. Spencer Adams, rhp, Kannapolis (White Sox).
17. Tyler Kolek, rhp, Greensboro (Marlins).
18. Luis Guillorme, ss, Savannah (Mets).
19. Ryan O'Hearn, 1b, Lexington (Royals).
20. Rhys Hoskins, 1b, Lakewood (Phillies)



Benintendi leads among first-rounders

BY MICHAEL LANANNA

In its first season in the short-season New York-Penn League, West Virginia won the league championship, taking down Staten Island in two games.

It wasn't an easy road for the Black Bears, who had to defeat a prospect-laden Williamsport team in three games to reach the finals, then had to face Yankees first-round pick James Kaprielian in the series-clinching game. For his part, Kaprielian, the former UCLA righthander selected 16th overall this June, likely would have ranked high on this list had he thrown enough innings to qualify.

The Black Bears, at one point, had a 2015 first-rounder of their own in shortstop Kevin Newman, before he got the call to low Class A West Virginia. As usually is the case, the league featured several first-rounders—six ranked on this list—but very few made an immediate impact this summer outside of the No. 1 prospect on this list.

1. ANDREW BENINTENDI OF

LOWELL (RED SOX)

AGE: 21. B-T: L-L. HT.: 5-10. WT.: 170. DRAFTED: Arkansas, 2015 (1).

Not every manager could remember how to pronounce Benintendi's last name—he was in the league for just 35 games—but they all remembered the swing. Short, direct and powerful, that same swing propelled Benintendi to a .376/.488/.717, 20-homer season with Omaha-bound Arkansas in the spring, earning him College Player of the Year honors and thrusting the draft-eligible sophomore into the first round.

So far, the seventh overall pick has made a seamless transition. Between Lowell and low Class A Greenville—where he was promoted Aug. 17—Benintendi hit 11 home runs in 198 at-bats, batting .313/.416/.556 overall. What he lacks in size, he makes up for in strength in his forearms and wrists, creating leverage and generating pull-side backspin. He adds above-average speed, excellent reads in center field and an advanced plate approach.

"He really knew how to play," Brooklyn manager Tom Gamboa said.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
124	19	36	2	4	7	15	25	15	7	1	.290	.408	.540

himself at Staten Island.

Acevedo hit 103 mph at least once this summer and routinely worked his fastball at or around triple digits. Sometimes he will overthrow, which can get his otherwise repeatable delivery out of sync. His command seemed to improve as he put his blister issues behind him, but it lags behind his control.

Acevedo complements his plus fastball with a plus changeup at 85-88 mph that serves as his main secondary offering. He completes the three-pitch mix with a below-average slider that he can throw for strikes but too often stays on the same plane as his fastball. If he can refine his slider, he could have frontline starter potential. Otherwise, Acevedo could end up as a high-leverage reliever.

W	L	ERA	G	GS	SV	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	Avg
3	0	1.69	11	11	0	48	37	15	9	2	15	53	.207

4. ERICK FEDDE

AUBURN (NATIONALS)

AGE: 22. B-T: R-R. HT.: 6-4. WT.: 180. DRAFTED: Nevada-Las Vegas, 2014 (1).

Fedde showed enough promise before having Tommy John surgery as a Nevada-Las Vegas junior that the Nationals still drafted him 18th overall in 2014. Prior to having T.J., Fedde had bumped 98 mph with what was at times a double-plus sinker that sat 93-95. He also mixed in a plus slider and a changeup that flashed plus.

Fedde's stuff wasn't all the way back in his pro debut this summer, for his sinker sat around 91-92 mph. He still had the look of a future No. 2 or 3 starter before moving up to low Class A Hagerstown, with his slider showing sharp tilt and his changeup still flashing plus potential. Fedde's delivery is clean, but his sinker can flatten and elevate if he overthrows or leaks out on his front side. Still, he induced groundballs at a high rate and gave up only one homer.

W	L	ERA	G	GS	SV	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	Avg
4	1	2.57	8	8	0	35	38	16	10	1	8	36	.264

5. FRANKLYN KILOME

WILLIAMSPORT (PHILLIES)

AGE: 20. B-T: R-R. HT.: 6-6. WT.: 175. SIGNED: Dominican Republic, 2013.

Kilome has been a project for the Phillies since he signed as an 18-year-old, but adding weight to his tall frame and incorporating his legs more into his otherwise clean delivery have done wonders for his fastball, which now bumps 97 mph.

Generally, Kilome sits 92-95 mph and has shown the ability to locate the pitch to both sides of the plate. His low-80s changeup is his third-best pitch, and he must tighten his hard 78-80 mph curveball, which flashes plus but not yet consistently.

"It's fringy-average," one NYP manager said. "It needs a lot more development, but it's in there."

2. VICTOR ROBLES OF

AUBURN (NATIONALS)

AGE: 18. B-T: R-R. HT.: 6-0. WT.: 185. SIGNED: Dominican Republic, 2013.

Robles was young for a league heavy on college draftees, but the 18-year-old all but forced the Nationals' hand after tearing up the Rookie-level Gulf Coast League by hitting .360 in 23 games. Following a July 19 promotion to Auburn, Robles didn't slow down in the slightest. Signed for \$225,000 in 2013, he has shown five-tool potential, including double-plus speed and arm strength that serve him well in center field.

"We've just been impressed with his ability to square up the ball," said one NYP manager, before adding: "He is kind of aggressive when it comes to the fastball."

That aggressiveness also manifests on the basepaths, where Robles can sometimes push the envelope a little too far. Power could be the last tool to develop as he continues to grow and pack on strength. As of now, his swing is more line-drive oriented.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
140	29	48	5	4	2	16	8	21	12	4	.343	.424	.479

3. DOMINGO ACEVEDO RHP

STATEN ISLAND (YANKEES)

AGE: 21. B-T: R-R. HT.: 6-7. WT.: 190. SIGNED: Dominican Republic, 2012.

Acevedo was set to begin his third year in the Yankees system at low Class A Charleston before a blister on his right middle finger derailed those plans. He went down to extended spring training and eventually found



Andrew Benintendi

Martin was one of three Southeastern Conference shortstops drafted in the first round. Though he's not as potent offensively as Dansby Swanson or Alex Bregman—the top two overall picks—Martin boasts more natural athleticism in the field. He has the range and arm strength to stick at shortstop.

Martin's batting potential is a little more up in the air. He has shown flashes of offensive potential as an amateur, but he didn't stand out at the plate this summer. He started off hot—10 hits in his first 19 at-bats—but had little consistency and struck out nearly twice as many times as he walked. Still, he has a top-of-the-order ceiling with his above-average speed and discerning batting eye.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
190	31	45	6	4	2	16	25	47	7	7	.237	.353	.342

9. D.J. STEWART OF

ABERDEEN (ORIOLES)

AGE: 21. B-R: L-R. HT.: 6-0. WT.: 230. DRAFTED: Florida State, 2015 (1).

Stewart won the ACC's player of the year as a sophomore and followed it up with a 15-homer junior year this spring prior to going 25th overall to the Orioles.

Behind those numbers is a unique tool package. Stewart is big-bodied and powerful but surprisingly nimble for his size. With his fringe-average speed and below-average arm, he's best suited for left field, where his power should play. The problem: most evaluators aren't sold on Stewart's unorthodox stance. Stewart crouches very low to the ground, and scouts question his ability to catch up to inside fastballs because of it.

"He cannot hit just the way he is right now," said one NYP manager.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
238	25	52	8	2	6	24	23	52	4	1	.218	.288	.345

10. JHALAN JACKSON OF

STATEN ISLAND (YANKEES)

AGE: 22. B-T: R-R. HT.: 6-3. WT.: 220. DRAFTED: Florida Southern, 2015 (7).

Jackson transferred to Florida Southern from Hillsborough (Fla.) CC and made an immediate impact his junior year, setting a school record with 20 home runs. Those numbers came down to earth in pro ball, but Jackson's power is a legitimate plus tool.

"You just don't see kids right out of college with this kind of raw power," Staten Island manager Patrick Osborn said.

Jackson has profile right-field tools, with a plus arm and at least average speed, though his long strides can slow his home-to-first times. He takes good angles and should be an average defender. Jackson's plate approach is a bit raw, though he showed the aptitude to make pitch-to-pitch adjustments.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
177	35	47	14	2	5	34	16	59	4	0	.266	.338	.452

THE SECOND TEN

11. Stone Garrett, of, Batavia (Marlins).

12. Tyler Alexander, 1Bp, Connecticut (Tigers).

13. Jose Pujols, of, Williamsport (Phillies).

14. Brandon Koch, rhp, Hudson Valley (Rays).

15. Afernee Seymour, ss, Batavia (Marlins).

16. Jacob Evans, 1Bp, State College (Cardinals).

17. Mikey White, ss, Vermont (Athletics).

18. Kyle Holder, ss, Staten Island (Yankees).

19. Josh Tobias, 2B, Williamsport (Phillies).

20. Mark Mathias, 2B, Mahoning Valley (Indians).



Swanson caps great year at top of NWL

BY VINCE LARA-CINISOMO

Hillsboro won its second straight short-season Northwest League title, defeating Tri-City. The Hops, led by former big leaguer Shelley Duncan in his managerial debut, featured 2015 No. 1 overall pick Dansby Swanson at shortstop and league pitcher of the year Carlos Hernandez.

The Hops, a Diamondbacks affiliate, also featured lefthander Jared Miller (before his promotion) and big southpaw Cody Reed. In total, Hillsboro placed four players on the Top 20 Prospects list, with three inside the top 10. Salem-Keizer relied on its power, leading the NWL in homers, thanks to first-rounder Chris Shaw from Boston College.

Everett also featured strong talent, with 2014 Baseball America High School Player of the Year and first-rounder Alex Jackson supplemented by 2015 college selections who excelled, led by shortstop Drew Jackson (Stanford), the league batting (.367) and stolen-base (47) champ, and center fielder Braden Bishop (.319).

1. DANSBY SWANSON SS

HILLSBORO (DIAMONDBACKS)

AGE: 21. **B-T:** R-R. **HT:** 6-0. **WT:** 175. **DRAFTED:** Vanderbilt, 2015 (1).

After a standout college career at Vanderbilt that resulted in one College World Series title followed by a runner-up finish, Swanson went No. 1 overall in the 2015 draft and signed with the Diamondbacks at the deadline for \$6.5 million. He also overcame a concussion he sustained after being hit in the face with a pitch in an intrasquad game.

Swanson has the athleticism and hands to play shortstop—and just enough arm. He gets rid of the ball quickly and his throws are accurate, and he can throw from multiple angles but maintain his arm slot. Outside of speed and makeup, Swanson doesn't have plus tools but draws praise as an intelligent hitter. He doesn't have great bat speed, but has good gap power with a cap of about 10-15 homers.

Scouts and managers say he has the "winning gene" and is a player who despite his pro inexperience already is seen as a leader. "His intensity is through the roof," one NWL evaluator said, "especially for the No. 1 pick. He has a desire to be really good."

AB R H 2B 3B HR RBI BB SO SB CS AVG OBP SLG
83 19 24 7 3 1 11 14 14 0 0 .289 .394 .482

2. IAN HAPP OF

EUGENE (CUBS)

AGE: 21. **B-T:** B-R. **HT:** 6-0. **WT:** 205. **DRAFTED:** Cincinnati, 2015 (1).

The Cubs had such success drafting a polished college bat in the first round in 2014 (Kyle Schwarber) that they did it again in 2015. So far, so good.

Happ's best position—like Schwarber—is the batter's box. The Cubs played him in center field exclusively at Eugene, and he moved around the outfield following a promotion to low Class A South Bend on July 25.

He has a fringe-average arm and needs significant footwork improvement to play in the dirt. His bat will play, though. Happ has excellent bat speed from both sides of the plate and projects as a plus hitter with average power. He has above-average speed underway.

"When guys can come to the plate and make 95-96 (mph) look slow, you know he's going to be a hitter," one NWL manager said.

AB R H 2B 3B HR RBI BB SO SB CS AVG OBP SLG
106 26 30 8 1 4 11 23 28 9 0 .283 .408 .491

3. ELOY JIMENEZ OF

EUGENE (CUBS)

AGE: 18. **B-T:** R-R. **HT:** 6-4. **WT:** 205. **SIGNED:** Dominican Republic, 2013.

The Cubs invested \$2.8 million to sign Jimenez in 2013. After a rough go in the Rookie-level Arizona League in 2014, he showed some of the promise the Cubs saw.

Jimenez is a strong, physical righthanded

batter with plus raw power. He can hit the ball out to all fields and shows tremendous opposite-field pop. He has a long swing, but his level bat path keeps the barrel in the zone a long time. He has average to tick above-average speed underway with a tick above-average arm as well. With experience, he should be at least an average defender in right field.

"Big bonus. Big tools," one scout said. "He's got a long ways to go, but he's aggressive and has some power. He hasn't quite taken another step (forward), but that's a solid year."

AB R H 2B 3B HR RBI BB SO SB CS AVG OBP SLG
232 36 66 10 0 7 33 15 43 3 2 .284 .328 .418

4. ALEX JACKSON OF

EVERETT (MARINERS)

AGE: 19. **B-T:** R-R. **HT:** 6-2. **WT:** 215. **DRAFTED:** HS—San Diego, 2014 (1).

The former Rancho Bernardo High catcher is now a right fielder, and the bat that got him popped sixth overall in 2014 remains his carrying tool. This year injuries to his left shoulder and left hand limiting him to 76 games.

Jackson struggled mightily in the first half at low Class A Fort Clinton, batting .157 with no home runs in 28 games. When he slid back to the NWL in June, his power emerged. Jackson swings hard, with plus bat speed and double-plus raw power, but the accompanying strikeout rate (29 percent) remains an issue. He's an aggressive hitter, but he lacks confidence and selectivity. His at-bats are inconsistent, and he tends to chase out of the zone. In the field, Jackson is athletic but stiff. He's an average runner, at best.

AB R H 2B 3B HR RBI BB SO SB CS AVG OBP SLG
163 31 39 11 1 8 25 21 61 2 4 .239 .365 .466

5. DREW JACKSON SS

EVERETT (MARINERS)

AGE: 22. **B-T:** R-R. **HT:** 6-2. **WT:** 195. **DRAFTED:** Stanford, 2015 (5).

The younger brother of Cubs 2009 first-rounder Brett Jackson, Drew lacks his sibling's physicality but raises the athleticism quotient. He has the ideal build for an infielder, with a double-plus throwing arm that allows him to easily make throws from the left side. He's a plus runner. At bat, Jackson has a line-drive stroke and a good feel to hit, but he will need to incorporate his lower body to add power. His amateur hitting track record tempers enthusiasm. Jackson hit .240 for Stanford but won the NWL batting title (.358) and also led the circuit with 64 runs and a .432 on-base percentage.

"I'm not totally sold on the bat," one NWL evaluator said, "but he's a good athlete and has raked since he got here."

Jackson led the league with 47 stolen bases.

AB R H 2B 3B HR RBI BB SO SB CS AVG OBP SLG
226 64 81 12 1 2 26 30 35 47 4 .358 .432 .447



6. TAYLOR CLARKE RHP

HILLSBORO (DIAMONDBACKS)

AGE: 22. **B-T:** R-R. **HT:** 6-4. **WT:** 200. **DRAFTED:** College of Charleston, 2015 (3).

Clarke was the Colonial Athletic Association's pitcher of the year in 2015, but the Diamondbacks began his career in the bullpen to limit his workload, and he dominated by tossing 23 scoreless innings, counting the playoffs. He commands a fastball that touched 96 mph and threw it for strikes to both sides of the plate. He showed what one evaluator called a "filthy" slider with great depth. Clarke had some feel for his changeup as an amateur but was mostly a two-pitch pitcher out of the bullpen.

"He shouldn't be (in the NWL). He was absolutely dominating," one manager said. "The ball comes out of his hand like a man who knows he should be at a higher level."

The long-term plan for Clarke calls for him to start.

W L ERA G GS SV IP H R ER HR BB SO AVG
0 0 0.00 13 0 3 21 8 0 0 0 4 27 .114

7. ANDREW MOORE RHP

EVERETT (MARINERS)

AGE: 21. **B-T:** R-R. **HT:** 6-0. **WT:** 185. **DRAFTED:** Oregon State, 2015 (2s).

Moore is a pitchability righthander who shot up draft boards in 2015 because of performance and dependability.

In the NWL, Moore's fastball sat 88-92 mph, a tick above what he was throwing in college. While his fastball velocity is average, his changeup is a bread-and-butter offering, and scouts graded his present command as plus.

"When you have his command and fastball and pitchability, now you're talking about a guy who can move quick," one evaluator said. "I'm not sure if he's a starter or reliever (ultimately), but he does not walk people and has a really sneaky fastball."

Moore does a good job repeating his over-the-top delivery, and his curveball grades as fringe-average to solid-average.

W L ERA G GS SV IP H R ER HR BB SO AVG
1 1 2.08 14 8 0 39 37 12 9 22 43 .250

8. CHRIS SHAW 1B

SALEM-KEIZER (GIANTS)

AGE: 21. **B-T:** L-R. **HT:** 6-3. **WT:** 229. **DRAFTED:** Boston College, 2015 (1).

The Giants have had success with college performers, from Buster Posey to Brandon Belt to Joe Panik, and Shaw continued that trend. He showed off his double-plus

lefthanded power stroke in the Cape Cod League last summer and then came into his junior year ready to rip, only to break the hamate bone in his right hand in April. He did not show the same power when he returned, but did as a pro.

He socked 12 homers to lead the NWL and led all batters who qualified for this list with a .264 isolated slugging percentage. Strikeouts will be a part of Shaw's skill set, and it remains unclear whether he'll be more than an average hitter as a pro.

Shaw played the outfield as an amateur, but his below-average speed will stick him at first.

AB R H 2B 3B HR RBI BB SO SB CS AVG OBP SLG
178 22 51 11 0 12 30 19 41 0 0 .287 .360 .551

9. CODY REED LHP

HILLSBORO (DIAMONDBACKS)

AGE: 19. **B-T:** L-L. **HT:** 6-3. **WT:** 245. **DRAFTED:** HS—Ardmore, Ala., 2014 (2).

Reed has a large frame and will need to continue to work at his conditioning. The big-bodied southpaw also carries a big fastball.

Reed touched 94 mph this season and sat 91-92 with good command. He doesn't yet possess swing-and-miss secondary offerings, but his fastball is "impossible" to square up, according to a scout.

Reed's low three-quarters arm slot provides deception such that hitters have a tough time picking up the ball. His inconsistent slider and changeup need considerable improvement for him to remain in the rotation.

"As a high school kid, he hasn't gone through the rigors that a college pitcher does," one NWL manager said. "I don't know what his long term (role) is—if he's a starter or reliever."

W L ERA G GS SV IP H R ER HR BB SO AVG
5 4 3.27 15 14 0 63 51 29 23 5 21 72 .219

10. KEVIN PADLO 3B

BOISE (ROCKIES)

AGE: 19. **B-T:** R-R. **HT:** 6-2. **WT:** 200. **DRAFTED:** HS—Murrieta, Calif., 2014 (5).

Padlo rebounded from a rough introduction to full-season ball to show a solid tool set and lead the NWL with 22 doubles, 33 extra-base hits and a .502 slugging percentage.

Padlo has solid-average raw power and makes consistent, hard contact. He has no problem spitting on offspeed stuff down. He had a pull approach when he entered pro ball but now shows an ability to use the whole field.

Padlo's arm is a tick above-average, but it's enough to play third base, and he has good enough footwork to handle the hot corner. An average but intelligent baserunner, he finished second in the NWL with 33 steals.

"He has quick feet at third," one NWL manager said. "He's a much better third baseman than you'd think."

AB R H 2B 3B HR RBI BB SO SB CS AVG OBP SLG
255 44 75 22 2 9 46 45 62 33 5 .294 .404 .502

THE SECOND TEN

11. Donnie Dewees, of, Eugene (Cubs).
12. Justin Steele, 1Bp, Eugene (Cubs).
13. Carson Sands, 1Bp, Eugene (Cubs).
14. Carlos Herrera, ss, Boise (Rockies).
15. Enyel de los Santos, rhp, Everett (Mariners).
16. Oscar de la Cruz, rhp, Eugene (Cubs).
17. Luiz Gohara, 1Bp, Everett (Mariners).
18. Jon Harris, rhp, Vancouver (Blue Jays).
19. Pedro Araujo, rhp, Eugene (Cubs).
20. Carlos Hernandez, rhp, Hillsboro (Diamondbacks).



BY HUDSON BELINSKY

The Appalachian League is the "Breakfast Club" of the minor leagues, bringing together players of all sorts of backgrounds for a three-month competition. The categories of players include recently drafted high schoolers, international players venturing outside complex leagues for the first time and college pitchers with innings limits.

Not every team scouts the Appy League. Those who do, however, sometimes get initial looks at young players with exciting tools and high ceilings. Many of the league's toolsiest players already are known to evaluators, but many others use the league to strut their stuff and announce their presence on the prospect scene.

Two of the top prospects, outfielders Daz Cameron and Kyle Tucker, signed with the Astros for \$4 million apiece out of the 2015 draft, then teamed to lead Greeneville to the league championship.

1. KYLE TUCKER OF GREENEVILLE (ASTROS)

AGE: 18. B-T: L-R. HT: 6-4. WT: 190. DRAFTED: HS—Tampa, 2015 (1).

The younger brother of Astros rookie Preston Tucker, Kyle was the High School Player of the Year, signed for \$4 million and helped Greeneville win the Appy League title. He went 9-for-24 (.375) with three home runs in the playoffs.

Tucker stands tall and upright in the box and keeps his hands low before barring his lead arm to load. He keeps the bat in the zone for quite a while, and he has shown the bat control to make consistent contact. Tucker already boasts plus raw power, with the ability to drive the ball deep over the fence to his pull side. As he ages and begins to fill out his frame, his power could develop into something special.

Tucker's athleticism is more graceful and balanced than it is explosive. He has solid-average speed, and he knows how to use his speed in the outfield. While he might be able to play center field, some scouts feel he profiles best in a corner.

AB R H 2B 3B HR RBI BB SO SB CS AVG OBP SLG
112 11 32 9 0 1 20 7 15 7 2 .286 .322 .393

(2014 first-rounder) Nick Gordon" in the Twins farm system.

Palacios' best tool is his righthanded bat. He has a knack for finding the barrel and generates line drives with his downhill swing. He can pull the ball over the fence when he runs into a pitch, but his offensive value is concentrated in his ability to reach base. He has plus bat speed and takes calm, controlled at-bats.

Defensively, Palacios shows sound fundamentals but lacks explosive foot speed. He's an average runner at best, and some scouts rated him below-average. He committed 16 errors in 31 games.

AB R H 2B 3B HR RBI BB SO SB CS AVG OBP SLG
140 23 47 14 2 2 23 3 20 5 2 .336 .345 .507

4. MAGNEURIS SIERRA OF JOHNSON CITY (CARDINALS)

AGE: 19. B-T: L-L. HT: 5-11. WT: 160. SIGNED: Dominican Republic, 2012.

Sierra seemed poised to handle an assignment at low Class A Peoria this season, but he hit just .191 in 51 games in the Midwest League, prompting the Cardinals to demote him to Johnson City.

Sierra came alive against lower-level pitchers, demanding the attention of scouts and opposing coaches. He uses an inside-out swing and quick hands to pepper both gaps with assertive line drives, though he lacks over-the-fence power in game action. Sierra struggles to make consistent contact on pitches in the lower half and has a tendency to chase breaking pitches outside of the zone.

In center field, Sierra has a chance to develop into an elite defender. He has top-of-the-scale speed and plus body control.

AB R H 2B 3B HR RBI BB SO SB CS AVG OBP SLG
216 38 68 8 0 3 15 19 42 15 2 .315 .371 .394

5. DAZ CAMERON OF GREENEVILLE (ASTROS)

AGE: 18. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-2. WT: 185. DRAFTED: HS—McDonough, Ga., 2015 (1s).

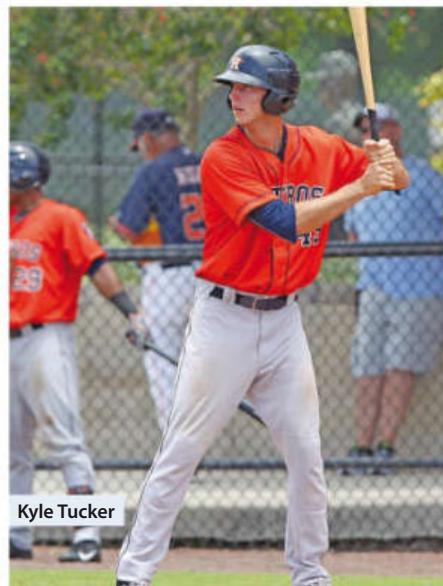
The son of long-time major leaguer Mike Cameron, Daz lacks his father's explosive athleticism but has impressive game ability and baseball skills.

Cameron loads his swing with a back elbow raise, making it difficult for him to control his barrel at times. He has loose wrists and shows the ability to extend his arms through the point of contact. He gives off many of the signals of a major league average bat, with plus bat speed and gap power.

In center field, Cameron is ready to play, with outstanding reactions and the ability to use his plus speed, which plays well on the bases and on defense. Based on his instincts, he has a strong chance to stay in center, making him a potential dynamic all-around talent.

AB R H 2B 3B HR RBI BB SO SB CS AVG OBP SLG
103 20 28 2 3 0 11 16 31 11 6 .272 .372 .350

Palacios' explosive U.S. debut started with a 1.061 OPS in the Rookie-level Gulf Coast League and continued at Elizabethton. According to one scout, he is "right there with



6. ALBERT ABREU RHP GREENEVILLE (ASTROS)

AGE: 19. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-2. WT: 175. SIGNED: Dominican Republic, 2013.

Abreu signed with the Astros for \$185,000 as a 17-year-old in 2013. He had size, a projectable frame and was already pitching at 87-91 mph. Now, he is a different pitcher.

Armed with a fastball that sits comfortably at 93-96 mph, Abreu bumped 99 at times this summer. He supplements his fastball with two breaking balls—a curveball and a slider—and a promising changeup, which flashes plus, according to one scout. He shows power on his curve, and he only recently adopted his slider.

Abreu's biggest focus going forward will be establishing the consistency and stamina required of a major league starter.

AB R H 2B 3B HR RBI BB SO SB CS AVG OBP SLG
200 30 60 8 4 7 16 16 38 6 2 .300 .361 .540

7. LUIS CARPIO SS/2B KINGSPORT (METS)

AGE: 18. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-0. WT: 165. SIGNED: Venezuela, 2013.

Carpio signed with the Mets for \$300,000 in July 2013, when he ranked as the No. 30 prospect available on the international market. The Mets skipped him over the Rookie-level Gulf Coast League and he handled it well, reaching base in 41 of the 45 games he played at Kingsport.

Carpio is a line-drive hitter with fast-twitch ability on both sides of the ball. He's an aggressive hitter with impressive feel for the barrel, though he lacks much in the way of power.

Carpio's also has defensive upside. He shared second base and shortstop with 2014 third-rounder Milton Ramos. Carpio showed improved footwork and average arm strength and should stay up the middle. Depending on how his body matures, he may project best at second base.

AB R H 2B 3B HR RBI BB SO SB CS AVG OBP SLG
83 19 24 7 3 1 11 14 14 0 0 .289 .394 .482

8. MIKE SOROKA RHP DANVILLE (BRAVES)

AGE: 18. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-4. WT: 195. DRAFTED: HS—Calgary, Alberta, 2015 (1).

Soroka showed off an upper-80s fastball and tight breaking ball in the 2013 Perfect Game showcase. Over the next 18 months, the Calgary-born righthander gained significant strength, saw his fastball increase in velocity and signed with the Braves for \$1,974,700 as

the 28th overall pick in the 2015 draft.

Soroka projects as a three-pitch horse. His fastball operated in the low 90s at Danville, and he flashed feel for his changeup and sharp breaking ball. He pounded the strike zone with all three pitches, surrendering just four walks. None of Soroka's individual pitches is overwhelming, but he can compete in the strike zone with each offering.

Soroka's control is above-average at present, and he could develop plus command as he continues to build innings. As one of the youngest players in his draft class, he did not turn 18 until August.

W L ERA G GS SV IP H R ER HR BB SO AVG
0 2 3.75 6 6 0 24 28 12 10 0 4 26 .283

9. EDMUNDO SOSA SS JOHNSON CITY (CARDINALS)

AGE: 19. B-T: R-R. HT: 5-11. WT: 170. SIGNED: Panama, 2012.

Sosa has made steady progress since signing as a 16-year-old out of Panama in July 2012 and had an outstanding season at Johnson City. He grew into more power and made steady progress from extended spring training through the end of the season. He added strength to his 5-foot-11 frame and made consistent hard contact this summer.

Sosa has sound bat-to-ball skills, though he can have issues with timing and hitting with topspin at times. Defensively, he has smooth hands and outstanding body control at shortstop, with the ability to make difficult plays look routine. His arm strength is not plus but could be adequate for the position.

AB R H 2B 3B HR RBI BB SO SB CS AVG OBP SLG
200 30 60 8 4 7 16 16 38 6 2 .300 .361 .540

10. ELIEZER ALVAREZ 2B JOHNSON CITY (CARDINALS)

AGE: 20. B-T: B-R. HT: 5-11. WT: 165. SIGNED: Dominican Republic, 2011.

Alvarez has battled a series of minor injuries since signing in July 2011, but he stayed healthy this summer and showed off electric fast-twitch ability at Johnson City.

Alvarez is a true five-tool talent, with a quick lefthanded stroke and developing power at the plate. He hit 20 doubles to rank third in the league, and multiple evaluators said he could develop above-average power. Alvarez will swing and miss at times, but he showed well against velocity and offspeed stuff throughout the summer, hitting at least .300 in each month.

Alvarez has double-plus speed, but it takes him a bit of time to get going out of the batter's box, so his run times to first base don't always reflect his true speed. At second base, he shows exceptional range and the ability to make plays out of his area.

AB R H 2B 3B HR RBI BB SO SB CS AVG OBP SLG
204 32 64 20 1 2 31 11 32 9 4 .314 .353 .451

THE SECOND TEN

11. Ashe Russell, rhp, Burlington (Royals).
12. Hoy Jun Park, ss, Pulaski (Yankees).
13. Ryan Helsley, rhp, Johnson City (Cardinals).
14. Ronald Acuna, of, Danville (Braves).
15. Travis Blankenhorn, 3b, Elizabethton (Twins).
16. Nolan Watson, rhp, Burlington (Royals).
17. LaMonte Wade, of, Elizabethton (Twins).
18. David Rodriguez, c, Princeton (Rays).
19. Nick Wells, 1b, Bluefield (Blue Jays).
20. Carlos Munoz, 1b, Bristol (Pirates).

3. JERMAINE PALACIOS SS ELIZABETHTON (TWINS)

AGE: 19. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-0. WT: 170. SIGNED: Venezuela, 2013.

Palacios' explosive U.S. debut started with a 1.061 OPS in the Rookie-level Gulf Coast League and continued at Elizabethton. According to one scout, he is "right there with

Rodgers heads youthful Pioneer group

BY BILL MITCHELL

The typical age of Rookie-level Pioneer League prospects is evenly split between teenagers and 20-somethings, but this year youth was served with the top seven prospects competing in the league before their 20th birthdays.

Three first-round picks made their pro debuts in the league, with Grand Junction shortstop Brendan Rodgers and Billings catcher Tyler Stephenson ranking as the circuit's top two prospects. Grand Junction righthander Mike Nikorak, a Rockies first-round pick in June, pitched poorly in eight games and did not log enough innings to qualify for the prospect list.

League MVP Isan Diaz, a shortstop, keyed a league championship for Missoula under first-year manager Joe Mather, whose Osprey took two of three games against Idaho Falls in the finals for a second title in four years. Diaz led the league in five different offensive categories: OPS (1.076), slugging (.640), extra-base hits (44), doubles (25) and total bases (174).

1. BRENDAN RODGERS SS

GRAND JUNCTION (ROCKIES)

AGE: 19. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-0. WT: 180. DRAFTED: HS—Lake Mary, Fla., 2015 (1).

The top talent available in this year's draft and the consensus No. 1 overall pick on many draft boards, Rodgers made his pro debut in Grand Junction with a season of highs and lows. The Rockies selected him with the third overall pick and signed him for \$5.5 million.

At this best, Rodgers showed the advanced hitting skills expected from a premium draft pick, but scouts were generally disappointed with his low energy level, subpar conditioning and recurring foot, hip and hamstring injuries that resulted in frequent absences from the lineup.

Rodgers has the tools to be an all-star caliber shortstop at the big league level. He's a natural hitter with an advanced feel for the bat head and elite bat speed that allows him to drive the ball with authority to all fields. He projects to play a solid shortstop with quick actions and an average arm that can get better with strength. He's no more than an average runner but is an excellent athlete who makes everything he does on the field look easy, sometimes leading to the impression that he isn't always playing with a high motor.

AB R H 2B 3B HR RBI BB SO SB CS AVG OBP SLG
143 22 39 8 2 3 20 15 37 4 3 .273 .340 .420

2. TYLER STEPHENSON, C

BILLINGS (REDS)

AGE: 19. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-4. WT: 225. DRAFTED: HS—

Kennesaw, Ga., 2015 (1).

Stephenson stands out for his size and physicality, and it's tempting for evaluators to wonder how much stronger he can get. Billings manager Dick Schofield pointed out that Stephenson hasn't yet gotten his "man muscles." Provided he doesn't grow too much larger, Stephenson should be able to stay behind the plate because of his athletic body, soft hands and good feel for catching.

Stephenson has a strong arm, but his lateral movement behind the plate is lacking, and his blocking and throwing need improvement.

At the plate, Stephenson is a confident hitter who controls the zone well. His physical strength produces raw power that should eventually translate into in-game pop. He makes good contact but does so with a short hand load that doesn't generate leverage.

AB R H 2B 3B HR RBI BB SO SB CS AVG OBP SLG
194 28 52 15 0 1 16 22 42 0 2 .268 .352 .361

3. ISAN DIAZ SS/2B

MISSOULA (DIAMONDBACKS)

AGE: 19. B-T: L-R. HT: 5-10. WT: 185. DRAFTED: HS—

Springfield, Mass., 2014 (2s).

Labeled as a bat-first middle infielder coming out of high school, Diaz struggled in the Rookie-level Arizona League following his selection in the supplemental second round

of the 2014 draft. An offseason mechanical adjustment that gave his swing more leverage, coupled with the confidence he gained from a fast start at Missoula, led Diaz to an MVP season in 2015. After hitting just .187 in his pro debut, he hit .360/.436/.640 with 13 home runs for the Osprey and led the Pioneer League in slugging (.640), extra-base hits (44) and doubles (25), among other categories.

One of the keys to Diaz's success at the plate is an uncanny ability to find the barrel with good bat speed. He's a slightly below-average runner who gets good jumps on the bases. His ability to stay at shortstop remains a question, but his defense has been solid with good first-step quickness and at least an average arm that may improve with strength and experience.

AB R H 2B 3B HR RBI BB SO SB CS AVG OBP SLG
272 58 98 25 6 13 51 34 65 12 7 .360 .436 .640

4. MARCOS DIPLAN RHP

HELENA (BREWERS)

AGE: 18. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-0. WT: 160. SIGNED: Dominican Republic, 2013 (Rangers).

Originally signed by the Rangers for \$1.3 million in 2013, Diplan was acquired by the Brewers as part of the package for Yovani Gallardo. He pitched in the Dominican Summer League last year, then skipped over the Rookie-level Arizona League and was the Pioneer League's most impressive young pitcher in his U.S. debut.

Despite his 6-foot frame, Diplan stands out for his savvy on the mound, drawing comparisons to fellow Dominican Pedro Martinez for his poise. Diplan commands three average or better pitches and shows good feel for his secondary stuff. He sits 90-94 and touches 98. Diplan's slider is already plus, and he shows the ability to use his changeup in any count.

W L ERA G GS SV IP H R ER HR BB SO AVG
2 2 3.75 13 7 0 50.1 47 21 21 4 21 54 .257

5. PETER LAMBERT RHP

GRAND JUNCTION (ROCKIES)

AGE: 18. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-2. WT: 185. DRAFTED: HS—

San Dimas, Calif., 2015 (2).

After signing for just shy of \$1.5 million as a second-round pick, Lambert was one of the Pioneer League's more impressive pitchers, thriving at 18 in an extreme hitter's league.

Owner of an athletic frame, Lambert has a projectable build and gets good downhill plane. He has good feel for command of a fastball that sits 88-92 mph and touches 95. A 78-82 mph curveball that he spins well is the gem of his arsenal, with at least one evaluator grading it as the best in the league. He's also got good feel for a solid changeup that he delivers around 82 mph. His delivery and arm work well, he's quick to the plate and throws all three pitches for strikes.

W L ERA G GS SV IP H R ER HR BB SO AVG
0 4 3.45 8 8 0 31.1 29 18 12 3 11 26 .227



Brendan Rodgers

plate in college, Ward hit well in the Pioneer League and also after a promotion to low Class A Burlington, though scouts are skeptical of how his bat will play at higher levels.

Defensively, Ward has an above-average arm that could be a plus tool when he learns to better use his lower half. He earned good marks for his receiving skills and will continue to improve with instruction. Ward is a gap-to-gap, contact hitter with limited power, but he controls the zone and draws his fair share of walks. He's a good athlete who should add strength.

AB R H 2B 3B HR RBI BB SO SB CS AVG OBP SLG
109 20 38 4 1 2 19 29 8 5 2 .349 .489 .459

9. JOSH STAUMONT RHP

IDAHO FALLS (ROYALS)

AGE: 21. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-2. WT: 190. DRAFTED: Azusa Pacific (Calif.), 2015 (2).

Staumont delivers some of the easiest triple-digit velocity in the minor leagues. Lack of command kept him out of the first round, but he showed steady progress in that regard during his pro debut. He struck out 14.6 batters per nine innings and allowed opponents to hit .168 at Idaho Falls, hinting at his potential.

Staumont has an absolutely overpowering fastball that generally sits at 96-97 mph and touches 101. When his power curveball at 82-84 mph flashes plus break and he's commanding his pitches, Staumont can be unhittable. Even though he walked 6.9 per nine, he throws with a clean arm action and has a consistent delivery. The Idaho Falls coaching staff worked with him on his front-side direction to help his command, but he's still very much a work in progress.

Staumont doesn't yet have a changeup, with the development of that pitch his next lesson.

W L ERA G GS SV IP H R ER HR BB SO AVG
3 1 3.16 14 1 1 31.1 18 11 11 0 24 51 .168

10. TYLER NEVIN 3B

GRAND JUNCTION (ROCKIES)

AGE: 18. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-4. WT: 200. DRAFTED: HS—

Poway, Calif., 2015 (1s).

The son of Phil Nevin, former big leaguer and current Triple-A Reno manager for the Diamondbacks, Tyler remains very raw and physically undeveloped.

A lean 6-foot-4, Nevin needs to get stronger to add power and durability, but at the plate he shows good pitch recognition and gets good backspin on balls with a hard, line-drive stroke. He can find the barrel and squares balls up with present gap power. His defense is inconsistent, but he should get quicker actions when he matures physically, and he has an average arm that could get stronger.

"His ability to make contact at that age was impressive," Grand Junction development supervisor Tony Diaz said.

AB R H 2B 3B HR RBI BB SO SB CS AVG OBP SLG
189 29 50 15 1 2 18 29 42 3 7 .265 .368 .386

THE SECOND TEN

11. Willie Calhoun, 2b, Ogden (Dodgers).
12. Tanner Rainey, rhp, Billings (Reds).
13. Amalani Fukofuka, of, Idaho Falls (Royals).
14. Blake Trahan, ss, Billings (Reds).
15. Jake Gatewood, ss, Helena (Brewers).
16. Marcus Wilson, of, Missoula (D-backs).
17. David Fletcher, ss, Orem (Angels).
18. Johan Cruz, 3b/ss, Great Falls (White Sox).
19. Joe Gatto, rhp, Orem (Angels).
20. Javier Medina, rhp, Grand Junction (Rockies).



Brewers prospects dominate AZL list

BY BILL MITCHELL

A veteran White Sox team captured its first Rookie-level Arizona League crown after escaping a bases-loaded jam in the bottom of the ninth inning to defeat the Mariners 3-2 in the championship game. It wasn't the first case of playoff dramatics for manager Mike Gellinger's squad, which started the postseason with an exciting 1-0 win in 11 innings against the Dodgers before defeating the Royals 4-1 in a semifinal game that spanned two days because of inclement weather.

Returning to the AZL after a one-year absence, the Royals dominated the regular season with a 40-16 record, earning veteran skipper Darryl Kennedy manager of the year honors. Reds first baseman James Vasquez, a 25th-round pick in 2015 from Central Florida, was named MVP after leading the league in batting average (.359), home runs (nine), slugging (.669) and OPS (1.084).

Ranking as the league's top prospect is Brewers outfielder Trent Clark, the No. 15 overall pick in the draft this year and one of three Milwaukee first-year players to rank among the top five.

1. TRENT CLARK OF BREWERS

AGE: 18. B-T: L-L. HT: 6-0. WT: 205. DRAFTED: HS—North Richland Hills, Texas, 2015 (1).

Clark's season nearly ended before it could really begin. The 18-year-old center fielder, who signed for \$2.7 million, crashed head first into the center-field wall in the first inning of his second pro game. He wound up with a concussion that kept him out of the lineup for two weeks and gave him a couple of shinners that lasted well into the summer. It didn't take long after returning to the lineup for Clark to show off his five-tool skills—he hit for the cycle in his fifth game back.

Clark is very polished for his age and already shows good leadership skills on the field. He puts together good at-bats and has a good idea of the strike zone. He was a little too passive early in the season, taking good pitches, but became more aggressive as the season progressed. He also worked on shortening his swing and staying longer in the hitting zone. An above-average runner with an above-average arm, Clark should be able to stay in the middle of the outfield. His arm is accurate and he gets good carry on the ball. He's a smart baserunner who gets good jumps on the bases.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
165	34	51	7	6	1	20	30	36	20	5	.309	.422	.442

tional bonus pool to sign Lara for just over \$3 million. He made a splash in his first instructional league last fall by blasting several tape-measure home runs. He tended to over-swing and try to pull every pitch during extended spring training, but the Brewers worked with him to use more of his hands and not all of his body to hit by shortening his stroke.

Lara started strong early in the AZL season, notching three four-hit games, before slumping in the second half primarily because of fatigue. Scouts also expressed concern about inconsistent efforts and work ethic later in the season. International scouts gave Lara little chance to stick at shortstop, believing he had a chance to play third base but could eventually end up in left field or at first base. Pro reviews were more generous to Lara, who shows the range, infield actions and above-average arm to potentially stay at shortstop, provided he doesn't grow too much.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
137	23	40	9	2	6	26	3	39	19	6	.292	.319	.518

4. PHIL BICKFORD RHP GIANTS

AGE: 20. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-5. WT: 205. DRAFTED: JC of Southern Nevada, 2015 (1).

Bickford didn't sign as a Blue Jays first-round pick out of high school in 2013. After one year at Cal State Fullerton, he transferred to JC of Southern Nevada, where he struck out 151 in 79 innings this year. The Giants selected Bickford with the 18th overall pick and signed the tall, lanky righthander for just over \$2.3 million.

Bickford dominated by relying heavily on his fastball, which he delivers in the low to mid-90s, with his velocity increasing in his last few outings. His fastball plays up because of his excellent command and the pitch's late, sinking life, and he's adept at changing the speed of his fastball. Bickford shows good feel for his slider and an emerging changeup that he used infrequently. All three pitches project to be above-average major league offerings with command.

W	L	ERA	G	GS	SV	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	Avg
0	2	1.53	11	11	0	35	25	7	6	0	9	23	.198

5. DEMI ORIMOLLOYE OF BREWERS

AGE: 18. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-4. WT: 225. DRAFTED: HS—Orleans, Ontario, 2015 (4).

One of the AZL's bigger surprises came from north of the border, with Canadian outfielder Orimoloye showcasing explosive tools and producing at a high level during his six weeks in the league. The native of Nigeria fell to the fourth round, with the Brewers signing him for \$450,000. Orimoloye led the league in homers (six) when he left Arizona to join Canada's national team for the 18U Baseball World Cup in Japan.

2. DYLAN CEASE RHP CUBS

AGE: 19. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-1. WT: 175. DRAFTED: HS—Milton, Ga., 2014 (6).

Cease projected as a 2014 first-round pick before an elbow injury in March that year prematurely ended his scholastic career. The Cubs drafted him in the sixth round and signed him for \$1.5 million to keep him from attending Vanderbilt. Cease made a relatively quick recovery from his July 2014 Tommy John surgery, flashing high-90s velocity in extended spring training games.

While Cease's command isn't back, he possessed some of the best stuff in the AZL. His fastball sat 95-96 mph and touched 99. His secondary pitches are inconsistent, with his low-80s curveball with three-quarters break an average pitch with enough spin to project a better grade. He doesn't yet use his fringy changeup much, but the arm speed is there.

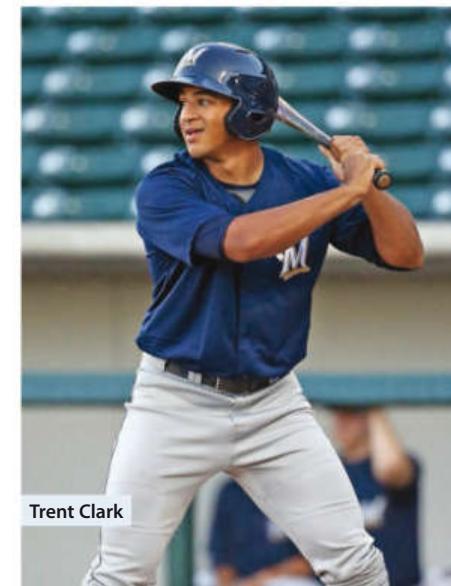
Some evaluators are concerned with Cease's delivery, and whether the use of his lower half will allow him to stay in the rotation.

W	L	ERA	G	GS	SV	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	Avg
1	2	2.63	11	8	0	24	12	12	7	0	16	25	.145

3. GILBERT LARA SS BREWERS

AGE: 17. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-2. WT: 190 Signed: Dominican Republic, 2014.

The Brewers used their entire 2014 interna-



Trent Clark

should improve with strength.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
177	35	44	4	6	0	13	23	57	27	3	.249	.342	.339

8. JACOB NIX

RHP

AGE: 19. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-3. WT: 200. DRAFTED: HS—Bradenton, Fla., 2015 (3).

Noted for being the "other guy" caught up in the Astros' inability to sign No. 1 overall pick Brady Aiken at the 2014 signing deadline, Nix passed on a UCLA offer to pitch a post-high school year at IMG Academy. The Padres drafted and signed him for \$900,000.

Nix has the potential for three plus pitches and a strong body that has some projection. Scouts commented that his results didn't always match his stuff, in part because of issues repeating his delivery out of the stretch. All three pitches in Nix's arsenal project to be above-average offerings, with his curveball being his best pitch. His fastball tops out at 95 mph, and he has a good feel for his changeup.

W	L	ERA	G	GS	SV	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	Avg
0	2	5.49	7	3	0	20	23	16	12	1	7	19	.284

9. GERSON GARABITO

RHP

ROYALS

AGE: 20. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-0. WT: 160. SIGNED: Dominican Republic, 2012.

Signed in 2012 for \$50,000, Garabito continues in the Royals' line of economical Latin pitchers, a group whose success stories include Yordano Ventura, Kelvin Herrera and Miguel Almonte.

Garabito works with a plus fastball in the 89-95 mph range, sitting mostly at 91-92. He's got a projectable, 6-foot frame, competes well and throws strikes. He spins a good curveball that improved this season and is learning to use his changeup. Garabito repeats his smooth delivery with minimal effort.

W	L	ERA	G	GS	SV	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	Avg
3	2	4.11	14	11	0	57	52	32	26	2	19	42	.242

10. DAKOTA CHALMERS

RHP

ATHLETICS

AGE: 18. B-T: R-R. HT: 6-3. WT: 170. DRAFTED: HS—Cumming, Ga., 2015 (3).

Few AZL pitchers have Chalmers' upside, but he comes with more risk than some of his counterparts. He flashed some of the best stuff in the league at times, showing why the Athletics paid him an over-slot \$1.2 million, but he needs to learn to throw consistent strikes and iron out mechanical issues with his high three-quarters delivery. Chalmers is a good athlete with a projectable frame. His fastball sat 93-95 mph and touched 97 with good life. His curveball has sharp bite that he needs to control better. He's also working on a slider, along with an emerging changeup that he doesn't use often. Chalmers is competitive but needs to improve his poise on the mound.

W	L	ERA	G	GS	SV	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	Avg
0	1	2.66	11	11	0	20	15	9	6	0	17	18	.205

THE SECOND TEN

11. Jordan Johnson, rhp, Giants.
12. Juan Hillman, lhp, Indians.
13. Jahmai Jones, of, Angels.
14. Jonathan Hernandez, rhp, Rangers.
15. Gabriel Mejia, of, Indians.
16. Ricky Aracena, ss, Royals.
17. Antonio Santillan, rhp, Reds.
18. Angel German, rhp, Dodgers.
19. Jose Herrera, c, Diamondbacks.
20. Dylan Thompson, rhp, Mariners.

Espinoza's heat leads stacked GCL crop

BY BEN BADLER

The Rookie-level Gulf Coast League in 2015 featured the most stacked collection of prospects the league has seen in a long time. The Florida complexes brimmed with premium high school draft picks who largely performed well in the GCL and several breakout international talents, and the league was replete with both impact talent and depth, albeit at the domestic level furthest away from the majors.

Red Sox righthander Anderson Espinoza and Nationals outfielder Victor Robles were two of the breakout stories of the minor league season, while Braves 2015 supplemental first-rounder Austin Riley dramatically raised his pre-draft stock in pro ball. Many other players with talent on par of a second- or third-round pick didn't make the cut, while just three of the seven GCL prospects who touched 100 mph rank among the top 20.

Espinoza led a strong Red Sox pitching staff that had a combined 2.28 ERA, best in the league. They finished with the league's best record in the regular season and repeated as GCL champions.

1. ANDERSON ESPINOZA RHP

RED SOX

AGE: 17. B-T: R-R. HT.: 6-0. WT.: 160. SIGNED: Venezuela, 2014.

Espinoza was the best pitching prospect on the international market last year when the Red Sox signed him for \$1.8 million.

After touching 94 mph last year, his fastball sat 94-98 this year and touched 100 mph. Espinoza uses a sharp, upper-70s curveball with tight spin that he will overthrow at times but flashes plus with power and two-plane break. He maintains his arm speed on his changeup, which bottoms out of the zone and projects as a plus pitch. His simple, repeatable delivery helps him throw plenty of strikes, and his feel for pitching is beyond his years. The Red Sox knew Espinoza had a small stress fracture in his right elbow before he signed and opted to let him rest and rehab, which has worked well so far. If Espinoza reaches his ceiling, he could be a No. 1 starter.

W	L	ERA	G	GS	SV	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	Avg	OBP	SLG
0	1	0.68	10	10	0	40	24	5	3	0	9	40	.170		

2. VICTOR ROBLES OF

NATIONALS

AGE: 18. B-T: R-R. HT.: 6-0. WT.: 185. SIGNED: Dominican Republic, 2013.

Robles' \$225,000 bonus from 2013 already looks like a bargain. Robles is a dynamic, high-energy player with quick-twitch actions, outstanding tools and a baseball IQ beyond his years. He's already an excellent defender in center field, where he takes advantage of his double-plus speed by getting good reads off the bat with excellent range. His arm grades as another double-plus tool.

With a short, fluid swing, Robles makes contact at a high rate. He has explosive hands, stays inside the ball and uses his lower half well. He stays balanced and sees the ball well, controlling the strike zone with good pitch recognition for his age, which gives him strong on-base skills. Robles has a line-drive approach with mostly gap power, but with his bat speed, strength projection and the extension he generates through the ball, he has a chance to grow into at least average power.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
73	19	27	6	1	2	11	10	12	12	1	.370	.484	.562

3. KYLE TUCKER OF

ASTROS

AGE: 18. B-T: L-R. HT.: 6-4. WT.: 190. DRAFTED: HS—Tampa, 2015 (1).

Tucker's older brother Preston signed with the Astros as a seventh-round pick in 2012 and reached Houston this season. Kyle, the No. 5 overall pick, is more polished and well-rounded at the same age. Despite his long arms and unorthodox load with his hands set low, he makes contact at a high rate because he uses his hands so well and keeps the bar-

rel through the hitting zone for a long time with a loose, level stroke. He has an advanced approach, using the whole field with a solid understanding of the strike zone. His power is mostly to his pull side, but he generates loft and drives the ball with authority to the opposite field with ease, so he could grow into plus power. Tall and lanky, Tucker is a good athlete for his size with solid-average speed and arm strength. He played some center but played mostly right field as a pro. His solid reads and routes give him a chance to become an above-average defender for a corner outfielder.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
120	19	25	3	2	2	13	9	14	4	2	.208	.267	.317

4. DAZ CAMERON OF

ASTROS

AGE: 18. B-T: R-R. HT.: 6-2. WT.: 185. DRAFTED: HS—McDonough, Ga., 2015 (1s).

Cameron is the son of Mike Cameron, a standout center fielder over his 17-year major league career. The Astros leveraged their extra draft bonus-pool space to work out a \$4 million deal for Cameron at No. 37 overall.

Cameron could have five average to plus tools with advanced feel for the game. He has excellent bat speed and stays inside the ball with a short stroke. He doesn't have natural rhythm and timing, but he works the count and uses the opposite field, projecting as a solid-average hitter. Cameron's swing and approach are geared more for line drives, though with his bat speed he could grow into average or better power once he learns to pull the ball. Cameron has a lean, athletic frame with plus speed and was a prolific basestealing threat in his pro debut. He's a smooth, polished defender in center field who gets good jumps off the bat. He could develop into a player along the lines of Austin Jackson.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
121	20	34	6	1	0	18	24	19	6	8	.281	.396	.347

5. CORNELIUS RANDOLPH OF

PHILLIES

AGE: 18. B-T: L-R. HT.: 5-11. WT.: 205. DRAFTED: HS—Griffin, Ga., 2015 (1).

Drafted 10th overall, Randolph ranked second in the GCL with a .425 on-base percentage.

Randolph has a calm, balanced swing and keeps his hands back before whipping the barrel through the zone. He recognizes spin and has excellent plate discipline. His bat speed and strength should produce above-average power, though he hit only one home run in the GCL. He adeptly uses the middle of the field and goes the other way, giving him a chance to develop home-run power once he learns which pitches to turn on.

Randolph played shortstop in high school, but the Phillies put him in left field. He is a below-average runner with a solid-average



Anderson Espinoza

Generously listed at 6-foot-2, Burrows packs electric stuff into a compact frame that prompted the Tigers to draft him 22nd overall. Burrows is a solid strike-thrower with a power fastball who operates at 93-95 mph and he reached 98 this spring. His power curveball was inconsistent but flashes plus. He can throw it for strikes and use it as a putaway pitch to rack up strikeouts. His changeup made rapid progress this spring with late drop, giving him a third potential above-average offering. Burrows has the stuff to be a front-end starter, though his stature and delivery, which features an extreme amount of tilt, worries some scouts. Others think he will hold up and has frontline starter potential.

W	L	ERA	G	GS	SV	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	Avg
1	0	1.61	10	9	0	28	18	7	5	0	11	33	.184

9. KE'BRYAN HAYES 3B

PIRATES

AGE: 18. B-T: R-R. HT.: 6-1. WT.: 210. DRAFTED: HS—Tomball, Texas, 2015 (1).

Charlie Hayes had a 14-year career as a third baseman in the majors. The Pirates drafted his son Ke'Bryan with the 32nd overall pick and he immediately made a strong impression by leading GCL with a .434 on-base percentage.

Big league bloodlines are evident in Hayes' polish. He has a patient hitting approach, staying within the strike zone with good bat control. Though he has average raw power, he gears his swing more for line drives during the game, which explains his limited extra-base production. He uses the middle of the field well, and when he learns to turn on certain pitches, he has a chance to hit 20 home runs.

He's a below-average runner and will always have to keep his body in check, but he has smooth hands, an above-average arm and made some excellent plays in the GCL.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
144	24	48	4	1	0	13	22	24	7	1	.333	.434	.375

10. AUSTIN RILEY 3B

BRAVES

AGE: 18. B-T: R-R. HT.: 6-2. WT.: 230. DRAFTED: HS—Southaven, Miss., 2015 (1s).

Riley's future appeared to be on the mound until his work at the plate this spring convinced more scouts of his offensive potential. The Braves were higher than most on Riley, drafting him at No. 41 overall. With a large, stocky build, Riley has plenty of strength and a quick bat to drive the ball with plus power. He uses the middle of the field and can go deep to any part of the park, with several home runs to straightaway center and multiple homers to the opposite field. He has a powerful swing geared for lifting the ball, so his thump comes with strikeouts, although he doesn't chase too much. Riley worked hard to get into better shape, and while he faces a possible move to first, he played a solid third base in pro ball and showed a plus arm.

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	CS	Avg	OBP	SLG
106	18	27	5	0	7	21	12	37	2	1	.255	.331	.500

THE SECOND TEN

- Ronald Acuna, of, Braves.
- Sandy Alcantara, rhp, Cardinals.
- Junior Fernandez, rhp, Cardinals.
- Josh Naylor, 1b, Marlins.
- Ryan Mountcastle, ss, Orioles.
- Nick Plummer, ss, Cardinals.
- Jermaine Palacios, ss, Twins.
- Adonis Medina, rhp, Phillies.
- Desmond Lindsay, of, Mets.
- Jonathan Arauz, ss/2b, Phillies.

Allard, Kaprielian wow in all-too-brief debuts

The July signing deadline has been a wonderful development for fans and evaluators because most players who sign by the deadline will qualify for a league Top 20 unless they move up too quickly.

But there still are exceptions, namely for recently drafted pitchers who were kept on strict innings limits. So here's a look at notable pitchers who did not play enough to qualify for any of our Top 20 Prospects lists.

Kolby Allard, lhp, Braves

Allard was considered one of the top high school pitching prospects in the 2015 draft class before he missed almost his entire senior year with a back injury. Allard slipped to the 14th pick in the draft because of the injury, signing for just more than \$3 million.

Allard was held out of action until August, making three short appearances in the Rookie-level Gulf Coast League. Allard was every bit as dominant as the Braves could have hoped in those six innings over three appearances. He struck out 12 of the 20 batters he faced and didn't allow a hit until his final outing.

Allard sat 90-93 mph and touched 94-95 in the Gulf Coast League with a fastball that has late life. His curveball also returned to his pre-injury form—it's a downward-breaking hammer. And his control was just as refined as it had been in high school. He hit one batter and didn't walk anyone in his six innings.

Jeff Degano, lhp, Yankees

Degano was a breakout star for Indiana State after missing most of 2013 and all of 2014 with Tommy John surgery. The 6-foot-4, 215-pound lefthander went 8-3, 2.36 with 126 strikeouts in 99 innings for the Sycamores and was the 57th overall selection in June.

Much like Yankees first-rounder James Kaprielian, Degano's workload was limited this summer. And, in fact, he piggybacked for Kaprielian at short-season Staten Island. Given those circumstances, Degano's lackluster numbers (0-4, 3.80) between Staten Island and the Rookie-level Gulf Coast League Yankees are a bit more understandable. On the positive side, Degano did show excellent command of his 90-94 mph fastball inside to righthanded hitters, and his plus 78-82 mph

breaking ball neutralized lefties. The development of Degano's fringy changeup, however, will be crucial if he's going to make it as a starter. It showed flashes of being an effective pitch, but Degano threw the change sparingly with Indiana State and still needs to gain a consistent feel for it.

Thomas Eshelman, rhp, Astros

Eshelman had the best control in college last season, but concerns about whether he'd have enough fastball led him to fall to second round (46th overall). The scouting report was unchanged in his brief four outings in August in pro ball split between the Rookie-level Gulf Coast League and low Class A Quad Cities

Even in short outings, Eshelman was pitching with a fringe-average fastball (88-92 mph). His control is excellent and he mixes a curveball, slider and changeup anywhere in the count. None of those pitches flashed as a future plus pitch but he locates all of them very well and knows how to use them. Eshelman profiles as a back-end starter with lots of fringe-average to average offerings and nothing plus except potentially his command.

Riley Ferrell, rhp, Astros

One of the best relief pitching prospects in college in 2015, Ferrell tailed off late in the college season, slid to the third round and then still landed a \$1 million signing bonus.

Ferrell has a plus fastball (95-96 mph) and the same plus slider he used at Texas Christian, but his control fell apart at Quad Cities—he walked 13 batters in his first 16½ innings as a pro.

In his worst outings, like a mid-July stint against Cedar Rapids, Ferrell simply couldn't throw a strike. In that game after giving up a hit, Ferrell threw 10 balls in 11 pitches to load the bases before allowing a run to score on a wild pitch.

Ferrell's delivery has some effort, he spins off toward first base and he struggles to synchronize his arm with his lower half. He also lacks athleticism in his listed 6-foot-1, 230-pound frame. But he had better control in college (3.6 walks per nine) so the Astros have reason to hope this is a correctable blip rather than a major cause for concern.



After pitching Vanderbilt into the College World Series, Carson Fulmer did the bulk of his pro work at high Class A Winston-Salem

BRIAN WESTERHOUT

Carson Fulmer, rhp, White Sox

Taken with the eighth pick in this year's draft, Fulmer made one appearance in the Rookie-level Arizona League before moving up to high Class A Winston-Salem. Fulmer pitched with Winston-Salem through the playoffs, but he was held on a very tight three-inning limit per outing in deference to his heavy college workload (128 innings with Vanderbilt this season).

Fulmer allowed just 16 hits over 25 innings. He also struck out 25 and walked just nine. Fulmer's fastball sits in the low-90s and can peak a few ticks higher. He couples it with a hard curveball with depth and bite that flashes plus at times. He's working on refining his changeup to make it a viable third pitch.

At instructional league the White Sox are expected to try to slow down Fulmer's high-energy, high-tempo delivery to something

more under control with hopes that it also improves Fulmer's sometimes shaky control.

Evaluators praise him for his tremendous makeup, which should help him greatly as he tinkers with that delivery. The White Sox sent Fulmer to the instructional league for two weeks before he goes home to rest after a long season that spanned nearly 151 innings. That's a jump of 60 innings from his sophomore season at Vanderbilt.

Tyler Jay, rhp, Twins

The sixth overall pick in the draft, Jay finished his college season starting (and losing) to Vanderbilt on the day of the first round of the draft, then signed for just less than \$3.9 million and joined high Class A Fort Myers just three weeks later.

His debut was a bit erratic as he adjusted to pro ball with better hitters and tighter strike zones, and he didn't always locate his hard,

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plus slider in the low 80s. Pro hitters didn't chase as often, but Jay got better as the year went on, posting seven straight scoreless outings to end the season with eight strikeouts and two walks over that span. Considering his college workload, the Twins were careful with Jay—he threw just 18 1/3 innings in 19 appearances and was not sent to instructs.

Jay didn't have the 100 mph heat of high Class A Fort Myers righty relievers Nick Burdi and J.T. Chargois, but scouts saw 96-97 mph from Jay. He flashes a changeup that he didn't need in a short relief role.

James Kaprielian, rhp, Yankees

One of the most polished college pitchers in the 2015 draft class, Kaprielian had a limited workload with the Yankees after throwing 106 1/3 innings—and going 10-4, 2.03—for UCLA in the spring. The 16th overall pick, Kaprielian threw just 11 innings between the Rookie-level Gulf Coast League and short-season Staten Island, but he impressed Yankees coaches with his beyond-his-years poise.

"Gosh, the first thing I noticed was the way he carries himself on the mound," Staten Island manager Patrick Osborn said. "He's very focused, in control, doesn't rush."

The 6-foot-4, 200-pound righthander commands a four-seamer at 92-93 mph and touched 95 for Staten Island. Kaprielian's plus 12-to-6 curveball was his go-to pitch with UCLA, but he mainly threw it early in counts with Staten Island, focusing instead on his changeup and slider. Both pitches generated swings and misses. His circle-change had firm, split-like downward action at 82-83 mph with good finish at the bottom of the strike zone, while the slider showed hard, late break.

Kaprielian was nearly untouchable in 12 1/3 innings in the New York-Penn League playoffs, striking out 10, walking two, and allowing just one run on seven hits. With his deep arsenal, above-average command and maturity, the righthander could be a quick mover in the Yankees system.

Nathan Kirby, lhp, Brewers

The ace of Virginia's national championship club had to be shut down for seven weeks during the Cavaliers' title run with a lat injury. Kirby returned to the mound for one final college appearance to pick up a save and end up at the bottom of the dogpile of the deciding game of the College World Series championship series.

His lat injury led Kirby to slip to the supplemental first round (40th overall). He didn't return to the mound again until early August, throwing 13 innings over five appearances before being shut down again with an elbow injury that eventually was determined to require Tommy John surgery.

In those few brief outings Kirby showed the 91-93 mph velocity he had shown at Virginia and mixed in a solid slider. Because of the timing of his surgery he most likely will be looking at spring training 2017 to return to action.

Mac Marshall, lhp, Giants

The 19-year-old Marshall has finally gotten a chance to settle down. He was expected to sign with the Astros as a 21st-round pick in 2014 but ended up as collateral damage when Brady Aiken didn't sign.

Marshall had committed to attend Louisiana State but ended up attending Chipola (Fla.) JC instead. He was taken by the Giants in the fourth round this year and in his short pro stint in the Arizona League and with Salem-Keizer, he showed much of the same stuff he has shown in the past—a promising fastball (89-93 mph) and a changeup and curveball that both flash plus.

But Marshall still has a long ways to go as far as refining his control and command. He



Yankees lefthander Jeff Degano worked on his changeup in two minor league stops

spring with UC Santa Barbara and raised his draft stock considerably.

Tate's delivery is littered with equal parts fast-twitch and funk and features premium arm speed. His fastball sits in the mid-90s and can touch the upper realms as well. He couples the pitch with a slider with 10-to-4 break that has flashed plus in the past. He also has a changeup and a cutter, both of which should improve with more repetitions.

After the increased workload that comes with a move out of the bullpen, the Rangers pitched Tate just nine innings this season. He allowed three hits and three walks in that period and struck out eight. He'll get a full offseason to rest before Texas unleashes him next year.

And Finally: Mat Batts, lhp

Batts doesn't fit in with the rest of this list, but he checks a box the rest of them don't: He has had a byline in *Baseball America*.

Batts served as a BA summer intern in 2013. He also was the Colonial Athletic Association pitcher of the year in 2014 for UNC Wilmington, going 5-3, 2.69 with 105 strikeouts and 18 walks in 104 innings.

Batts has continued to be a strike-throwing machine since the Twins drafted him in the 16th round last year. The 5-foot-11, 190-pounder had a 67-7 strikeout-walk mark in 61 innings over three levels last year and was almost as good in 2015. He went 11-6, 2.61 overall in 141 innings, and his 1.8 walks per nine rate ranked in the 90th percentile across all minor league baseball.

Batts intrigued scouts and managers in the Florida State League, but he's hard to project



Strike-throwing Mat Batts will have to keep proving himself thanks to his 86 mph fastball

as a prospect because of a fastball that tops out around 86-87 mph. He attacks hitters inside, pitches fast, has a feel for using and commanding four pitches and misses down when he misses. "His arm slot is very unique," Fort Myers manager Jeff Smith said. "And he's got a very long stride, so he's very close to the hitter. He gets great extension, so that 86 seems like 90."



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Pompey comes full circle for Toronto

TORONTO | Blue Jays

BY SHI DAVIDI



For statistics, organization reports, prospect lists and recent drafts, check out: baseballamerica.com/t/organization-reports/

TORONTO From Opening Day center fielder to Double-A New Hampshire and eventually back to the big leagues as a September callup, the 2015 season has been a challenging one for **Dalton Pompey**.

Add in a pair of stints at Triple-A Buffalo in between his other stops and you can understand why the 22-year-old who went from high Class A to the majors last year describes this year as a “roller-coaster.” Despite the rough ride, Pompey said he feels “definitely more advanced” as a player.

“Just finding myself, what type of player that I am and that I need to be,” he said.

BALTIMORE | Orioles

BY ROCH KUBATKO

Hess Catches Manager's Eye

BALTIMORE Orioles manager **Buck Showalter** remembers looking at righthander **David Hess** as he sat with two other draft picks from 2014 during a press conference at Camden Yards. Hess was a fifth-rounder, the latest of the trio, but he stood out. There was just something about the kid.

Showalter liked Hess’ composure and presence, qualities that transferred to the mound.

Hess, 22, produced one of the finest seasons among Orioles’ minor leaguers this year, going 9-4, 3.58 in 143 innings between high Class A Frederick before moving up to Double-A Bowie. Hess allowed five runs and struck out 12 over 10 innings in his first two starts for the Baysox, who won their division and eventually the Eastern League championship.

“He’s the guy I talked to you all about in that first press conference,” Showalter said. “He was the guy who caught my eye just with the look in his eye. He was impressive. Not that the other ones weren’t, but Hess caught my eye.”

“They were really debating whether to start him at Delmarva or Frederick this year. They kind of force-fed him a little bit in Frederick and he took off the second half and ended up in Double-A. He’s got a good arm and he can spin it. He’s a good pitcher. I’ve seen a lot of tape on him. A good-looking player.”

The Orioles chose Hess in the fifth round out of Tennessee Tech. He went a combined 2-1, 3.24 in 10 games (seven starts) between short-season Aberdeen and low Class A Delmarva in his first professional season.

A year later, Hess is on a Double-A staff and still impressing.

“The fact that he’s a first-year player, first full season and he’s pitching in the Double-A playoffs says a lot about how well he’s doing,” farm director **Brian Graham** said. “He’s a four-pitch guy—fastball, curveball, slider, change. He’s a pitcher that goes after hitters and I respect that. He doesn’t back off and he’s had a very good first year.”

BIRD SEED

■ The Orioles claimed infielder **Andy Wilkins** off waivers from the Dodgers and his two-run double in the ninth inning gave Triple-A Norfolk a 6-5 win over Columbus in Game Four of the International League playoffs.

■ The Orioles designated lefthander **Cesar Cabral** for assignment to make room for Wilkins on the 40-man roster. Cabral cleared waivers and was outrighted to Norfolk.

“Using the opposite field when I’m hitting, bunting, trying to keep the ball out of the air as much as I can—I’m going to hit the ball in the air sometimes and drive the ball—but I really focus in BP and in my work on trying to keep the ball as low as possible to try and use my speed.”

“In the field, working on my jumps, how can I be more efficient in getting those jumps, finding out different techniques that help me, and when I was in the minor leagues, I had a chance to do all that stuff.”

Pompey, a 16th-round pick in 2010 out of an Ontario high school, hit .188/.258/.329 in 26 games and struggled defensively with the Blue Jays before getting optioned to Buffalo. After more struggles there, he was dropped to New Hampshire, where he reconnected with hitting coach **Stubby Clapp**.

A .351/.405/.545 average in 31 games sent him back to the Bisons, where he earned a September promotion. Pivotal was his work

with Clapp, with whom he developed a routine that he continues to follow.

“Knowing everything I need to do every single day put me in good position to be successful,” Pompey said. “Last year I was kind of going along with it, but now I know what to expect being here, I’m more in tune with the type of player that I am and I think that’s going to help me.”

JAYS CHATTER

■ First-base prospect **Rowdy Tellez** was headed to the Arizona Fall League after his breakout season was cut short by hamate surgery on his right hand. Joining him in the AFL: corner infielder **Matt Dean**, outfielder **Roemon Fields**, righthanders **Brady Dragmire** and **Justin Shafer**, and lefthander **Chad Girodo**.

■ Righthander **Clinton Hollon** received a 50-game suspension after testing positive for an amphetamine. He pitched in 12 games for short-season Vancouver and low Class A Lansing after returning from Tommy John surgery, and the majority of the ban will be served next year.



Dalton Pompey

ED WOLSTEN

BOSTON | Red Sox

BY ALEX SPEIER

Espinosa Evokes Pedro Images

BOSTON Perhaps this is what it is like to see lightning strike the same place twice.

In 44 years in professional baseball, and 37 as a coach, Red Sox Latin American pitching coordinator **Goose Gregson** can recall only one pitcher who, as a 17-year-old, inspired the same sort of initial impression as righthander **Anderson Espinoza**.

“I don’t like to compare a pitcher to a pitcher. I think you simply draw from experience if you’re reminded of someone,” Gregson said. “I was with **Pedro (Martinez)** at this age, and now with this kid at this age. It clearly draws my memory back to when I spent time with Pedro as a young kid. They’re two of the best (at that age) I’ve ever seen.”

Gregson cited the ease of both pitchers’ deliveries, their ability to conjure surprising velocity from undersized frames, work ethic, makeup, and determination as common traits. Espinoza, in fact, throws considerably harder than did the 17-year-old Martinez, often sitting at 94-98 mph and touching triple digits, while showing a changeup and curveball that Gregson described as average or better, all with an under-control delivery that permits him to command his arsenal.

Espinoza, who posted a 1.23 ERA and had a 65-to-14 strikeout-to-walk ratio at three levels this season, represents a pitching prospect unlike any seen by the Red Sox in decades. The advancement of his mix defies his youth.

While Espinoza has considerable development in front of him, his potential is obvious to those who have seen him—including the man to whom he is often compared.

“I’ve actually met (Martinez). We’re actually about the same size. He’s been able to give me a lot of advice here and in the Dominican Republic,” Espinoza said through a translator. “One of the things he’s told me is, ‘Don’t be scared of the guys who are 6-foot-6. We may be small, but we have huge hearts.’

“One time I was pitching, he saw me and he pulled me aside. He said, ‘One day, when I’m retired, I want to see you on TV, and I don’t want you to have changed.’”

SOX YARNS

■ **Yoan Moncada** is expected to spend four weeks this offseason playing for Caguas of the Puerto Rican League.

■ First-rounder **Andrew Benintendi** hit 11 homers in 54 games in his pro debut, giving him 31 longballs in 119 games in 2015 between his college season at Arkansas.

NEW YORK | Yankees

BY GEORGE KING

Pazos A Surprise Untouchable

NEW YORK When **Hal Steinbrenner** spoke at the owners meetings following the July 31 non-waiver trade deadline, he said the Yankees weren’t interested in dealing **Luis Severino**, **Aaron Judge**, **Greg Bird**, **Gary Sanchez** and **James Pazos**.

As the names rolled off Steinbrenner’s lips, nothing came as a shock until the end. While Pazos had certainly impressed in four minor league seasons and enjoyed a solid 2015 season with Double-A Trenton and Triple-A Scranton/Wilkes-Barre, it was interesting to hear Steinbrenner include his name in that group.

And when the rosters expanded on Sept. 1, Pazos was among the players added to the big league roster.

“It’s been unbelievable, a dream come true,” said Pazos, a 13th-round pick in the 2012 draft out of San Diego, of being a big leaguer.

A lot of times teams break in newcomers slowly, using them in games decided one way or another. Not Pazos. His first two big league appearances were in the ninth inning of games that resulted in a 3-2 loss and a 5-3 defeat.

In 27 games between Trenton and Scranton, the 6-foot-3, 230-pound lefty—who works with a fastball that averages 93 mph and hits 96—went 3-1, 1.27 and whiffed 49 against 15 walks.

According to assistant GM **Billy Eppler**, Pazos bears a resemblance to former Yankee reliever **Boone Logan**.

“It’s a power arm with a good slider,” Eppler said of Pazos and Logan. “The difference is Boone got to the big leagues at a very young age.”

Austin Romine caught Pazos at Triple-A and gave the 24-year-old high marks.

“He is aggressive who throws hard with a funky angle,” Romine said. “Fastball, slider he likes throwing in to righthanders. He is not afraid. He is a bulldog who goes after people.”

YANKEES DOODLES

■ Catcher **Gary Sanchez**’s solid season at Scranton was rewarded with a call up Sept. 12. Sanchez, 22, re-established himself as a high-end prospect this season. Had it not been for a hamstring problem, Sanchez might have been promoted when the rosters expanded on Sept. 1.

■ Righthander **James Kaprielian**, the team’s first of two first-round picks in June, finished the year with short-season Staten Island in the New York-Penn League playoffs. Kaprielian fanned six in 6 1/3 shutout frames in his final start.

TAMPA BAY | Rays

BY MARC TOPKIN

Maile Delivered To Tampa Bay

ST. PETERSBURG, FLA. Catcher **Luke Maile** had already had an eventful 2015 season.

In May, while with Triple-A Durham, he was on the wrong end of an odd and painful play when Pawtucket’s **Humberto Quintero** appeared to intentionally hit Maile in the stomach with a throw. “Internet sensation,” Maile joked of the viral video.

In August, at Norfolk, he grounded into a triple play. “That went all over the place, too,” he said. “Having a nice year so far.”

Actually, it couldn’t have turned out better.

After navigating his first season at Triple-A, playing well behind the plate but hitting just .207/.98/.296, Maile was rewarded with a Sept. 1 callup to the majors.

The 24-year-old, an eighth-round pick from Kentucky whose name rarely showed up on any prospect lists, was overcome with emotion after getting the news from Durham manager **Jared Sandberg**.

“I’m not going to lie, I was crying pretty good there,” he said.

But then Maile joined the Rays and got to work, taking advantage of the opportunity to serve as the third catcher, created by **Curt Casali** being on the disabled list, with manager **Kevin Cash** saying they want to give him a chance to play.

Maile made his debut off the bench in Baltimore that night, and was handed the lineup card from home plate ump **Chris Guccione** with “congratulations” written on top as a special souvenir, and got his first hit on Sept. 12 in Tampa.

“It was definitely one of those things when I got the call that it was sort of a relief, that you kind of knock that door down, so to speak,” he said. “Now that it’s happened everything is in the past and I just get to move forward from here and that’s a really nice feeling.”

COOL RAYS

■ High Class A Charlotte won the Florida State League championship with a walkoff walk win in Game Four of the best-of-five series. It was the 14th minor league championship overall for the Rays and first in the FSL since 1997.

■ Two of the Rays’ top young infield prospects, **Willy Adames** and **Adrian Rondon**, were shut down during their minor league seasons due to sore arms. Adames, 19, was acquired from the Tigers in the July 2014 trade of **David Price**. Rondon, 17, was signed out of the Dominican in July to a nearly \$3 million bonus. Both will attend instructional league and are expected to be good to go for spring training.

Health keys Jenkins' breakout season

ATLANTA | Braves

BY BILL BALLEW



For statistics, organization reports, prospect lists and recent drafts, check out: baseballamerica.com/t/organization-reports/

ATLANTA Righthander **Shelby Miller** showed this year that the Braves received a major part of their rotation in last fall's trade with the Cardinals. That bounty could double as soon as 2016 if righty **Tyrell Jenkins**' debut in the organization proves to be a harbinger of things to come.

After enduring serious shoulder and lat-muscle injuries during his days with the Cardinals, Jenkins proved he was completely healthy in 2015, when he made a career-high 25 starts. The Braves named him their minor league pitcher of the year after he went 8-9, 3.19 with 88 strikeouts in 138 innings split

between Double-A Mississippi and Triple-A Gwinnett.

"The biggest thing has been just being healthy," said Jenkins, 23. "Maybe for the first time since I signed, I felt like I did my freshman year of high school. Just being able to throw the ball free, and easy and not being worried about compensating for something that might be hurt, is a blessing."

Jenkins, a 2010 sandwich pick out of high school in Henderson, Texas, showed his maturity and ability to make adjustments. After giving up a season-high nine runs in a May 1 start, he bounced back six days later to toss six shutout innings against Biloxi. He finished his time in the Southern League with a 2.25 ERA over his final 11 starts.

Jenkins' success continued after being promoted to Gwinnett on July 9. In his International League debut, he tossed seven shutout innings against Norfolk while earning the win in a 1-0 decision.

An all-state quarterback in high school, Jenkins was packed and ready to attend Baylor on a football scholarship before changing his mind at the last minute and signing with St. Louis for \$1.3 million.

Jenkins says his goal now is to make that final jump to the big leagues and prove he can become a workhorse at the game's top level. His repertoire, which includes two- and four-seam fastballs with excellent movement, a hard curveball and a solid changeup, could make that a reality—provided he remains healthy.

WIGWAM WISPS

- The Braves selected center fielder **Mallek Smith** as their minor league player of the year. He hit .306 with 57 stolen bases between Mississippi and Gwinnett.
- The Braves activated righthander **Daniel Winkler**, a Rule 5 pick from the Rockies, in September after he rehabbed from Tommy John surgery all season. Though not 100 percent, he will throw batting practice and side sessions.



Tyrell Jenkins

TOM PRUDY

MIAMI | Marlins

BY WALTER VILLA

Fast Progress

MIAMI If the Marlins could conduct the 2014 draft again, then seventh-rounder **Anfernee Seymour** would go "a lot higher" than he did.

That's the opinion of **Lazaro Llanes**, the scout who signed Seymour for the Marlins.

Llanes said Seymour was the fastest high school player in the 2014 draft, and scouting director **Stan Meek** said the shortstop ran the 60-yard dash in 6.14 seconds, which is the best he has ever timed.

"He has a long way to go," Llanes said of Seymour, 20, who spent the season at short-season Batavia. "But he's further ahead than what I thought two years ago."

Born in the Bahamas, Seymour played his junior year of high school at American Heritage High in Delray Beach, Fla.

As a senior, he played for a Delray Beach baseball academy called Elev8, which is run by former major league infielder **Luis Alicea**.

A righthanded-hitting center fielder back then, Seymour signed with the Marlins for \$400,000 and became a switch-hitting shortstop.

At 5-foot-11, 165 pounds, he doesn't project to have much power. He hit .273/.338/.349 in 64 games this season and ranked second in the New York-Penn League with 29 steals.

Batavia manager **Angel Espada** said Seymour is "very smart" and has made huge strides from the start of the season.

Espada said Seymour, who bats leadoff, has the green light to run any time he wants, but the two of them talk often about the best counts on which to turn it loose.

"He steals most of his bases on pure speed," Espada said, "but he has the work ethic and willingness to study pitchers' moves."

Defensively, Seymour works on his "internal clock," knowing the runner and how much time he has to make a play. For now, Seymour has a tendency to rush throws and over-run grounders.

FISH BITES

■ High Class A Jupiter center fielder **Yefri Perez** received a thrill on Aug. 15 when he faced rehabbing Mets lefthander **Steven Matz**. In his only at-bat versus Matz, Perez recorded an infield hit, stole second, advanced to third on the catcher's throwing error and later scored on a single.

■ Marlins domestic minor league affiliates finished with a cumulative .427 winning percentage this season, the lowest in the game. Only the Rookie-level Gulf Coast League team (.550) won more often than it lost.

NEW YORK | Mets

BY ADAM RUBIN

Mr. Versatile

NEW YORK High Class A St. Lucie's **Jeff McNeil** finished second in the Florida State League in batting with a .312 average, two points behind Clearwater's **Willians Astudillo**. Now, the 23-year-old infielder will represent the Mets in the Arizona Fall League.

A 12th-round pick in 2013 out of Long Beach State, McNeil split his time primarily between second and third base this season. He also received limited work at first base and shortstop, and the lefthanded hitter can play the outfield in an emergency.

"I can basically play everywhere," said McNeil, who moved to Double-A Binghamton for the playoffs. "I grew up playing shortstop. When I went to college, I played second and left field my freshman year. And then my sophomore and junior year I played center, second and some right."

"I feel comfortable wherever they put me, (but) I'm most comfortable at second and third as of right now."

McNeil doesn't hit for much power—only one home run in 119 games this year—but he set the table effectively in the FSL, which he led with a .373 on-base percentage and 80 runs scored.

The 6-foot-1, 165-pound McNeil said one goal is to "get a little bit stronger" and to drive balls with more power.

"I've always hit for average," he said.

Baseball actually may not be McNeil's best sport. He's also a scratch golfer, who played in the U.S. Junior Amateur Championship in 2009.

"Teammates know I'm good. So they stay away," McNeil said. "I was planning on playing college golf. It's kind of what I wanted to do, but I actually didn't get recruited very hard by anyone. So that's kind of when I started playing baseball again."

McNeil said college teams began noticing him on his younger brother **Ryan's** scout team. The Cubs drafted Ryan, a prep righthander, in the third round of the 2012 draft.

METAMORPHOSES

■ The Eastern League selected Binghamton shortstop **Gavin Cecchini** as its rookie of the year after he hit .317/.377/.442 and finished second in the batting race.

■ **Jose Leger** won the low Class A South Atlantic League's manager of the year award. In their final season in Savannah before moving to Columbia, S.C., the Sand Gnats had an 18-game winning streak in August.

PHILADELPHIA | Phillies

BY JIM SALISBURY

Altherr Appears On Radar

PHILADELPHIA Outfielder **Aaron Altherr** always has flown a little under the radar on the organization's depth chart. He's never been flashy, but he always had tools.

Those who have watched the 24-year-old righthanded batter's methodical rise through the system point to his consistent improvement as reason for believing he can blossom into a productive big leaguer.

The rebuilding Phillies have given Altherr consistent playing time since recalling him from Triple-A Lehigh Valley in mid-August.

Club officials are trying to determine if he can be part of their outfield in 2016, and early returns have been positive, for 12 of his first 21 hits went for extra bases. He had slugged .457 through 92 at-bats.

The Phillies made Altherr, a rangy and athletic 6-foot-5 and 220 pounds, a ninth-round pick in 2009 out of Agua Fria High in Avondale, Ariz. He's always been an excellent defender at all three outfield positions.

Altherr's swing came together in the Venezuelan League last winter, when he hit .286 with 11 extra-base hits and 16 walks in 31 games. He continued to swing well this season, hitting .293/.367/.487 in 111 games at Double-A Reading and Lehigh Valley before coming up.

"I saw a much more polished hitter this year," Triple-A manager **Dave Brundage** said. "He's really getting on the fastball and being more aggressive. In the past he was a more passive hitter."

Altherr spent time in big league camp the last two years and had a two-game cameo with Philadelphia in 2014, but everything about him looks different now. He has the quiet confidence of a young player who has come to believe he belongs.

"Through experience and good hitting coaches, I finally found a plan at the plate and I'm sticking with it," Altherr said. "I'm a little more selective, but when I get my pitch, I'm attacking it."

PHIL-UPS

■ Phillies domestic affiliates ranked fourth in the game with a cumulative .542 winning percentage. Reading, high Class A Clearwater and short-season Williamsport all qualified for the playoffs.

■ Reading first baseman **Brock Stassi** won the Eastern League's MVP award. He hit .300/.394/.470 with 15 homers in 133 games and led the circuit with 32 doubles and 90 RBIs.

WASHINGTON | Nationals

BY LACY LUSK

Improvement All Around

WASHINGTON Short-season Auburn third baseman **Kelvin Gutierrez** played in the New York-Penn League all-star game and then saved his best baseball for the Doubledays' final nine games.

Gutierrez, a 22-year-old from the Dominican Republic, closed the season with seven multi-hit games during a nine-game hitting streak in which he went 17-for-38 (.447). He hit .305/.358/.414 in 62 games and led the league with 21 doubles.

After signing in April 2013, Gutierrez played one year in the Dominican Summer League and another in the Rookie-level Gulf Coast League.

"I improved my hitting and fielding this year, and I got better with my emotions," Gutierrez said through an interpreter.

Gutierrez struck out 52 times and drew 16 walks, but he showed he could make adjustments against pitchers at a higher level.

"At the plate, he uses the middle of the field well and has made strides shortening up his swing," farm director **Mark Scialabba** said of the 6-foot-3, 185-pound righthanded batter.

Gutierrez said he enjoyed getting the chance to play shortstop at the all-star game in Aberdeen, Md. That was his original position in the DSL two years ago, but he was primarily a third baseman this summer.

"He's a big, strong, physical, athletic third baseman," Scialabba said. "Defensively, he has the potential to be above-average with a plus arm."

In the all-star game, Gutierrez grounded to the pitcher in his lone at-bat. He entered for the victorious Northern Division team in the fifth inning on defense and recorded one assist. His only disappointment? Gutierrez was on deck when the final batter was retired.

"I wanted that last at-bat to show them what I got, but it didn't work that way," Gutierrez said.

CAPITAL GAINS

■ Double-A Harrisburg lefthander **Richard Bleier** and catcher **Pedro Severino** made the Eastern League all-star team. The 28-year-old Bleier went 8-3, 2.45 in 16 games for the Senators, while the Nationals called up Severino, 22, in September after he hit .246/.288/.331 in 91 games.

■ Low Class A Hagerstown first baseman **Jose Marmolejos** made the South Atlantic League all-star team after hitting .310/.363/.485 in 124 games with league-leading totals for hits (145), doubles (39), extra-base hits (55) and RBIs (87).

Johnson gets back in Chicago's plans

CHICAGO | White Sox

BY SCOT GREGOR



For statistics, organization reports, prospect lists and recent drafts, check out: baseballamerica.com/t/organization-reports/

CHICAGO Erik Johnson is back on the radar.

After combining to go 12-3, 1.96 in 24 starts with Double-A Birmingham and Triple-A Charlotte in 2013, the righthander's contract was purchased in September and he went 3-2, 3.25 in five starts with Chicago.

The immediate success vaulted Johnson into the White Sox rotation at the start of last season, but he wasn't the same pitcher. He had a 6.46 ERA in five starts before being optioned back to Charlotte, where he was even worse (5-7, 6.73 in 20 starts).

"Physically, it wasn't anything like an injury or anything," said Johnson, though he did

miss the final two weeks of the 2014 Triple-A season with right shoulder inflammation. "It was an inefficiency in my movements throughout my mechanics and that's what I really honed in on during the offseason, cleaning it up and doing what I needed to do to be consistent and be on time with my arm path and my body."

Johnson, 25, pitched well in spring training, but with Jeff Samardzija on the roster, there was no room in the rotation. Five months later, the situation changed. Samardzija was a major disappointment, and he is headed for free agency at the end of the season.

Johnson, meanwhile, made all the right adjustments. The 6-foot-3, 230-pounder was 11-8, 2.37 while striking out 136 in 133 innings and winning International League most valuable pitcher honors.

The strong showing earned Johnson another September audition with the White Sox, and a chance for a job in the 2016 rotation.

"That's the goal," said Johnson, a second-round pick in 2011 out of Los Altos (Calif.) High. "That's what I'm playing for. I want to play here and I want to stay in the big leagues."

Johnson pitched 11 innings in his first two starts with Chicago and allowed four runs on nine hits and five walks while striking out none. He also allowed four solo home runs.

"Solo home runs, those are going to happen," Johnson said. "When you tie walks into them, that's not OK."

CHI-LITES

■ After a scoreless inning in the Rookie-level Arizona League, 2015 first-round draft pick Carson Fulmer spent the rest of the season at high Class A Winston-Salem, allowing five runs in 22 innings (2.05 ERA) while striking out 25.

■ The White Sox claimed third baseman Mike Olt off waivers from the Cubs and added him to the expanded September roster. They did not call up Matt Davidson, who led the IL with 23 home runs but hit just .203/.293/.375.



Erik Johnson

BILL MITCHELL

CLEVELAND | Indians

BY JIM INGRAHAM

Paulino Rebounds

CLEVELAND In many ways, he was the hot Indians' shortstop prospect who got engulfed by the vapor trail Francisco Lindor left in his rapid ascent to the major leagues.

But after a couple of years when his star seemed to be flickering, Dorssys Paulino had a bounce back season in 2015. He's still 20, and he's now an outfielder, not a shortstop, but Paulino is once again putting up impressive numbers.

Paulino was a highly regarded amateur out of the Dominican Republic when the Indians signed him for \$1.1 million in July of 2011, a month after the Indians selected Lindor with the eighth overall pick in the draft.

Paulino immediately started opening eyes when as a 17-year-old he hit .355/.404/.610 in the Rookie-level Arizona League in 2012. Following that season he ranked as the Indians' No. 2 prospect.

In 2013, Paulino, at 18, became the shortstop at low Class A Lake County, where he seemed to plateau. He hit .246/.297/.349 in 2013, repeated Lake County in 2014, and hit .251/.311/.354.

Starting his third consecutive season at Lake County this year, the results weren't much better. In addition to mounting error totals as a shortstop, which resulted in him being converted to left field, Paulino also struggled with the bat.

Through 83 games he was hitting .256/.319/.464, when Indians officials decided to move him to high Class A Lynchburg. That when the hits started coming, as Paulino hit .305/.371/.526 in 43 games at Lynchburg.

"Because we pushed him to Lake County so early, it's easy to forget that Dorssys is still young in his career," farm director Carter Hawkins said. "Having said that, he's matured quite a bit in terms of his habits and routines, and has put himself in a better position to tap into his natural ability."

SMOKE SIGNALS

■ Outfielder Carlos Moncrief, who hit a combined .227/.346/.367 with 11 homers and 51 RBIs at Triple-A Columbus and Double-A Akron this year, was designated for assignment. The Indians had to clear a spot on their 40-man roster after calling up veteran utilityman Michael Martinez from Columbus in September.

■ Lefthander Giovanni Soto was also among the September callups. In 46 relief appearances at Columbus, he was 2-1, 2.68 with 51 strikeouts and 29 walks in 54 innings.

DETROIT | Tigers

BY CHRIS IOTT

Fall Assignment

DETROIT Some teams send players to the Arizona Fall League to work on a specific pitch or to concentrate on a new position. Tigers righthander Montreal Robertson will play there for a simple reason: to pitch.

Assistant general manager David Chadd said Robertson merely needs innings as he continues to work his way slowly but surely through the minor leagues.

"He just needs to pitch more than anything," Chadd said. "Repetition. We started him out as a starter and he's found his niche in the bullpen. He has three power pitches: fastball, slider, change. He's just got to go and continue to get quality hitters out and that's what he'll do in the fall league."

Robertson, 25, is 6-foot-4, 205 pounds, a 29th-round pick in 2011 out of Coahoma (Miss.) CC.

Robertson pitched limited innings in high school and junior college, so the Tigers expected that it would take some time for him to develop.

Chadd said Robertson throws his fastball 95-98 mph and has good stuff. He has averaged 8.7 strikeouts but also 4.2 walks per nine innings in five seasons in the minors.

"It is quality stuff," Chadd said. "Easy delivery. Good body. Athletic. It's just that Montreal didn't pitch a lot before we signed him, so he's slowly progressing into what we thought he would."

Robertson went 2-4, 3.48 with a 1.613 WHIP in 2015 in his first season at Double-A Erie after starting the season at high Class A Lakeland. He struck out 58 batters in 68 innings between the two teams.

"Electric stuff," Chadd said. "He's got to develop a little more."

The Tigers are also sending righthanders Jeff Ferrell, Austin Kubitz and Adam Ravenelle to join Robertson in the Scottsdale rotation. Shortstop JaCoby Jones and first baseman Dominic Ficociello will also be there.

TIGER TALES

■ The Tigers left just three healthy members of the 40-man roster behind when they expanded their roster for September: outfielder Wynton Bernard and righthanders Angel Nesbitt and Guido Knudson.

■ Bernard fell just two hits short of tying Erie's season record. Bernard hit .301/.352/.408 and finished with 161 hits. Omar Infante had 163 hits for Erie in 2001.

KANSAS CITY | Royals

BY ALAN ESKEW

Starling Steps Forward

KANSAS CITY Bubba Starling labeled this a "turning point year" in spring training, a season where he acknowledged he needed to start "figuring things out."

Starling, the fifth overall pick in 2011, eschewed a Nebraska football scholarship to play quarterback to sign with the Royals.

The Royals preached patience with Starling, who played for a small Kansas City suburb high school, Gardner-Edgerton, where he was all-state in baseball, football and basketball.

After Starling hit .218/.304/.338 while striking out 150 times in 482 at-bats in 2014 with high Class A Wilmington, the Royals sent him back to the Blue Rocks to start 2015.

Starling, 23, promptly began a breakout season, hitting .386/.471/.614 in a dozen Carolina League games, earning an April 24 promotion to Double-A Northwest Arkansas.

Starling got off to a torrid start with the Naturals, homering in three straight games and had an .846 OPS after 15 games before suffering a hamstring injury May 10 and did not return until June 6. He hit .254/.318/.426 with 10 homers in 91 Double-A games.

"Bubba has had a very steady year, all year long," Royals assistant general manager J.J. Picollo said. "He's been very consistent, all the things he set out to do this offseason as far as having a consistent season."

"His consistency in his approach, he maintained it through the season. If he gets a little off track, he gets back on track pretty fast, so that's been encouraging."

Starling's winter workout included sessions with Hall of Famer George Brett.

"I think (this was) the first offseason where he really worked," Picollo said. "He did his work before, but this was a daily thing."

Starling will return to the Arizona Fall League after hitting .177 in 20 games last year.

"He just kept working and working," Picollo said. "I think that's a sign of maturity on his part, realizing where he needs to be to get prepared for a season and it's paid off."

ROYALTIES

■ Triple-A Omaha's Jose Martinez led the Pacific Coast League with a .384 batting average and a 1.024 OPS. That's the highest PCL average since Gene Woodling hit .385 in 1948 for the San Francisco Seals.

■ Outfielder Rudy Martin, a 25th-round pick in 2014, hit .338/.477/.541 and topped the Rookie-level Arizona League in on-base percentage.

MINNESOTA | Twins

BY PHIL MILLER

Power Stroke

MINNEAPOLIS Their scouts tell the Twins that Adam Brett Walker and his Big Gulp strike zone would be carved up by big league pitchers like a pumpkin at Halloween. Their imaginations, though, tell them that if a pitcher makes a mistake with a fastball, it might land in St. Paul.

Walker, a 23-year-old outfielder, is an interesting conundrum for the Twins.

"When he gets hold of one, it goes. It might bring rain," said Twins general manager Terry Ryan, who made two trips this summer to see Double-A Chattanooga, where Walker led the Southern League in home runs (31) and RBIs (106). "But he still has a lot of work to do. I don't think we've ever had somebody in his category."

He means, someone with the power to clear not only outfield fences but parking lots behind them—but who also swings and misses at historic rates. In four seasons, Walker has twice led his league in strikeouts, and twice finished second. This year at Chattanooga, he led the minors with 195 whiffs in 133 games while hitting .239/.308/.498.

"Strikeouts aren't as big an issue in baseball as they were five years ago, I know that," Ryan said. "But if you're striking out that much in Double-A, they're going to accumulate up here a heck of a lot more. And that's just not going to be acceptable."

As a test of that theory, the Twins have assigned Walker to the Arizona Fall League.

"We'd like to see him become more selective, not just go fishing for fastballs," Ryan said. "Take a pitch and force the pitcher to throw strikes. (Miguel) Sano has that kind of power, too, but he commands the strike zone."

Still, Walker's 51 walks, 31 doubles and 13 stolen bases this year make it clear he can help a team, if he can make a little more contact.

"We've seen plenty of progress," Ryan said.

TWIN KILLINGS

■ Ryan decided not to promote the franchise's top pitching prospect, Triple-A righthander Jose Berrios, to Minnesota for September, largely out of concern for his workload. Berrios amassed a career-high 166 innings at Double-A and Triple-A, posting a combined 2.87 ERA and 175 strikeouts.

■ Low Class A Cedar Rapids manager Jake Mauer joined the Twins after the Midwest League playoffs, uniting him with his brother, first baseman Joe Mauer. "It's the one time I'll get to be the big brother," Joe Mauer joked.

Finnegan gets chance to begin again

CINCINNATI | Reds

BY C. TRENT ROSECRANS



For statistics, organization reports, prospect lists and recent drafts, check out: baseballamerica.com/t/organization-reports/

CINCINNATI The Reds have said since their deadline deal with the Royals that they want **Brandon Finnegan** to start—and he's finally getting his chance.

Finnegan replaced **Michael Lorenzen** in the Reds' all-rookie rotation in the final weeks of the season, after Lorenzen shifted to the bullpen to conserve innings on his arm.

Finnegan was called up from Triple-A Louisville after rosters expanded in September, believing he'd finish the year in the bullpen after starting in Louisville.

The Reds have been clear with Finnegan since acquiring him with **John Lamb** and

Cody Reed at the trade deadline in the deal that sent **Johnny Cueto** to the Royals—they see him as a starter. He was used as a starter in Louisville and struggled, but still the course was set. The September callup would give him a chance to start, but only after making two appearances out of Cincinnati's bullpen.

"I like starting. I love it. I've done it my whole life," Finnegan said after getting the call to Cincinnati. "I want to show people I can start at this level. If it doesn't work, it doesn't work. I can fall back on the relieving part. We'll just see how it goes."

The 22-year-old, selected 17th overall out of Texas Christian in 2014, went 0-3, 6.23 in eight starts at Louisville this season, after posting a 3-0, 2.96 in 14 relief appearances for the Royals. Last season he pitched out of the bullpen down the stretch and into the playoffs for Kansas City.

This year brought more uncertainty.

"It's one of those things where I came into

spring training and not knowing what I was going to do," Finnegan said. "I came in and my arm was out of shape, so I wasn't ready to go. I went out to Double-A and I started and I threw well. As soon as I got two starts, I left for Kansas City and then came back down and made a start and then went to the pen and then went back up and just went all over the place. It's one of those things where I couldn't get in a starting routine."

"It was tough, but it's fun, it's all part of it and I know it's just what happens. I'm still young, so hopefully I still have a lot of years to come."

RED HOTS

■ For the third straight season, Louisville won its final game of the season in walkoff fashion against Indianapolis. This time **Brennan Boesch** doubled in the winning run.

■ Double-A Pensacola second baseman **Ray Chang** finished 2015 in style, playing all nine positions in the Blue Wahoos' final game. He threw a scoreless inning of relief.



Brandon Finnegan

BILL MITCHELL

CHICAGO | Cubs

BY GORDON WITTENMYER

Candelario Pushes Way In

CHICAGO You don't find him on any of the top-prospects lists, but Double-A third baseman **Jeimer Candelario** is one of the more intriguing prospects, especially with several of the top-ranked hitters reaching the bigs.

A breakout season that got better after a promotion for the switch-hitter has him poised to earn a place among the next wave of prospects to join **Anthony Rizzo**, **Kris Bryant**, **Addison Russell** and **Kyle Schwarber**.

"He's definitely put himself in that (next) mix," farm director **Jaron Madison** said.

Candelario, 21, spent the final 46 games of the season at Double-A Tennessee after a promotion from high Class A Myrtle Beach, and his hitting and power jumped, going from .270 before the promotion to .291 with an .841 OPS in Tennessee.

Madison said Candelario may have been pressing too hard in 2014 as he worked on adjustments to his hitting approach and might have struggled at times to understand what the coaches wanted from him.

"This year he had a chance to relax and play and let his talent take over," Madison said. "He has a great swing from both sides of the plate and he can drive the ball to all fields from both sides of the plate. It was just a confidence thing with him."

The Cubs are looking for him to carry that over into the Arizona Fall League and hope to see a little more power before he heads back home to the Dominican Republic.

Since **Joe Maddon** was hired as manager, the Cubs have made a particular emphasis of versatility in the system.

"At the end of the day he's a third baseman," Madison said. "He's made huge strides defensively at third base, and I think that's a good problem to have if he's ready to go to the big leagues, and we'll let (executives) **Jed (Hoyer)** and **Theo (Epstein)** worry about what to play him."

CUBBYHOLES

■ Myrtle Beach pitchers yielded just four runs in 28 innings (1.29) during the Pelicans' playoff sweep of Wilmington in the Carolina League playoffs. Starters **Jen-Ho Tseng**, **Tyler Skulina** and **Duane Underwood** combined for just two runs in 17 innings (1.06), with 17 strikeouts and three walks. ■ The Cubs finished with two minor league batting champions: catcher **Willson Contreras** in the Southern League (.333) and infielder **Chesny Young** in the Carolina League (.321).

MILWAUKEE | Brewers

BY TOM HAUDRICOURT

Upward Mobility

MILWAUKEE When catcher **Nevin Ashley** headed for his locker after the final game of the season at Triple-A Colorado Springs, he was intercepted by manager **Rick Sweet**. Ashley figured Sweet was going to congratulate him on a nice year.

Instead, Sweet told Ashley he had been purchased by the Brewers. When you've spent 10 years and 870 games in the minors with nary a day in the big leagues, it takes a while to process that information.

"It's been 10 years of waiting, so it was definitely a good feeling," said Ashley, signed as a minor league free agent by the Brewers in January. "It's a great accomplishment for the season I had."

That's the way the Brewers saw it as well. They could have recalled **Juan Centeno**, who is on the 40-man roster, to be their third catcher for the final month instead of adding Ashley, a non-roster player.

But they felt Ashley deserved his first shot at the majors after batting .306/.374/.442 with eight home runs and 61 RBIs in 337 at-bats.

"Any time a guy puts in that much time and a lot of work over those 10 years, to get the opportunity means he earned it," Brewers manager **Craig Counsell** said. "It's great to reward people like that who have earned it."

Ashley briefly considered hanging up his catching gear, but his wife told him to stick with it.

"Since I was a kid, I dreamed of this," he said. "Throughout the year, I kept grinding and it turned out. I'll take this detour any day."

"It's a dream come true. I'm just excited it happened this year with the Brewers."

And it only got better for Ashley. He got his first major league start the day after reporting and ripped an RBI double off the Marlins' **Tom Koehler** in his first trip to the plate.

Not too shabby after a 10-year wait.

MICROBREWS

■ Outfielder **Daniel Fields** was claimed off waivers from the Tigers and optioned to Double-A Biloxi to participate in the Southern League playoffs. Fields, 24, made his big league debut with the Tigers in June but spent most of the year at Triple-A Toledo, where he hit .228/.335/.367 with seven home runs and 41 RBIs.

■ Righthander **Jorge Ortega** won the Florida State League ERA title (2.41) at high Class A Brevard County and righthander **Tyler Wagner** won it in the Southern League (2.25) at Biloxi.

PITTSBURGH | Pirates

BY JOHN PERROTTO

M&M Boys To AFL

PITTSBURGH The Pirates are sending an interesting group of players to the Arizona Fall League, including two of the better prospects in their system.

Center fielder **Austin Meadows** and catcher **Reese McGuire** are the headliners among a group of seven who will play for the Glendale Desert Dogs. The 20-year-olds were both first-round draft picks in 2013.

Meadows finished the season at Double-A Altoona after hitting .307/.357/.407 for high Class A Bradenton with seven home runs and 21 RBIs in 508 at-bats.

McGuire is an above-average defensive catcher but batted just .254/.301/.294 with no homers for Bradenton in 412 at-bats. He also struggled throwing out basestealers, catching just 25 percent (27 of 107).

The Pirates feel both can benefit offensively from seeing more advanced pitchers in the AFL.

Shortstop/outfielder **Adam Frazier** will get a chance to further enhance his rising status as a prospect after winning the Eastern League batting title with Double-A Altoona. The 23-year-old hit .324/.384/.416 with two homers and 11 steals in 423 at-bats.

Another prospect who took a big step forward, lefthander **Steven Brault**, leads a group of four pitchers that includes lefty **Cody Dickson** and righthanders **Tyler Eppler** and **Brett McKinney**.

Dickson, 23, had an up-and-down season with Bradenton, going 12-7, 4.13 in 27 starts with

Eppler, 22, missed the first half of the season with shoulder tendinitis then went a combined 6-2, 3.64 in 15 games, including 13 starts with Bradenton and Altoona.

McKinney, 24, had 10 saves in a combined 44 relief appearances with Bradenton and Altoona, but was 0-5, 5.87.

PITTBURGERS

■ Triple-A Indianapolis catcher **Elias Diaz** was the only September callup who had not previously played in the major leagues, as the Pirates opted to go with experience in a pennant race. Diaz, 24, hit .271/.330/.382 and threw out 30 percent of basestealers. He also won BA's Captain's Catcher's Award as the best catcher in the minor leagues (see Page 12).

■ The seven farm clubs combined for a 417-345 record for a winning percentage of .547. Indianapolis, Altoona, low Class A West Virginia and short-season West Virginia all qualified for the playoffs.

ST. LOUIS | Cardinals

BY DERRICK GOOLD

Arizona Finishing League

ST. LOUIS There have been times when the Cardinals felt, internally, that they had to reach to fill their quota of players to send to the Arizona Fall League.

This year, filling the spots was not an issue.

The group of eight that the Cardinals are sending to the AFL is headlined by one of the top pitching talents in the minors, right-hander **Alex Reyes**. The 21-year-old went 5-7, 2.49 with 151 strikeouts and 49 walks in 102 innings over three levels.

Reyes, who routinely cracked 100 mph with his fastball late in starts, will be limited to about 30 innings at the Arizona Fall League, general manager **John Mozeliak** said.

The team wants to see him against stiffer competition and begin his preparation for a 2016 that some within the organization believe will be the summer of his debut in the majors.

Two infielders, **Aledmys Diaz** and **Patrick Wisdom**, earned their invites to Arizona with strong stretches this past season. Wisdom, a third baseman, was sent back to camp in Jupiter, Fla., after initial struggles at Double-A to work on the consistency of his swing, and he returned to hit 14 homers and 20 doubles with a .242/.300/.419 overall line before slowing to .167 average in August.

Diaz, the Cuban shortstop the Cardinals signed in March 2014, hit .312/.373/.539 in the second half, and he could get a look in a utility role at some point in 2016.

Luke Weaver, the Cardinals' first-round pick in 2014, impressed after a slow start to the spring and earned a spot in Arizona with a 8-5, 1.74 season at high Class A Palm Beach.

Catcher **Michael Ohlman** did not get called up to the majors in September. Instead, the team had him get ready for Arizona. Others headed to Arizona are lefty **Dean Kiekhefer**, power righthander **Robby Rowland**, and outfielder **Charlie Tilson**, a speedster who will play in a part-time role.

REDBIRD CHIRPS

■ A second suspension for a positive drug test puts catcher **Cody Stanley**'s place with the organization in jeopardy. Stanley was suspended 80 games and removed from the major league roster in September. The penalty came just a week before **Yadier Molina** was injured.

■ Rookie-level infielder **Allen Cordoba**, a 19-year-old Panamanian shortstop, won the Gulf Coast League's MVP award. Cordoba hit .342/.401/.421 in 53 games.

Brooks quietly makes way to Oakland

OAKLAND | Athletics

BY CASEY TEFERTILLER



For statistics, organization reports, prospect lists and recent drafts, check out: baseballamerica.com/t/organization-reports/

OAKLAND The accolades kept piling up for **Aaron Brooks** and, still, no one seemed to notice.

The righthander made a Rookie-level all-star team in 2011 and was his club's pitcher of the year in both Double- and Triple-A, yet he hardly caused a ripple among evaluators.

And, he said, it did not bother him a bit.

"I've just tried to be humble my whole life," said Brooks, 25. "I've come to realize that it doesn't matter. You've got guys who are ranked No. 1, and that doesn't always pan out. I realized I wasn't part of that group, and I decided not to worry about it."

So Brooks quietly charted a course to the

majors, whether evaluators believed in him or not. He received a brief callup with the Royals in 2014, then was traded to the Athletics as part of the **Ben Zobrist** deal this July.

Immediately called up by Oakland, Brooks provided two outstanding starts, then struggled in his next three.

The 6-foot-4 righthander throws both four- and two-seam fastballs in the low 90s, a curve and a slider. His big weapon is a changeup that can dominate hitters. It breaks late, away from lefthanders and comes from the same arm slot as his fastball.

"It makes his fastball that much better," pitching coach **Curt Young** said. "It makes his slider that much better. Knowing that he can change speeds at any time, in any count, has been a big strength since he's been here."

Brooks has used his big league time to audition for the 2016 rotation, though he went just 2-4, 7.19 through his first nine games, striking out 33 and walking 11 in 41 innings.

Brooks grew up in San Bernardino, Calif., a little less than an hour's drive from Angel Stadium in Anaheim, where his dad **Terry** took him to a passel of Angels games.

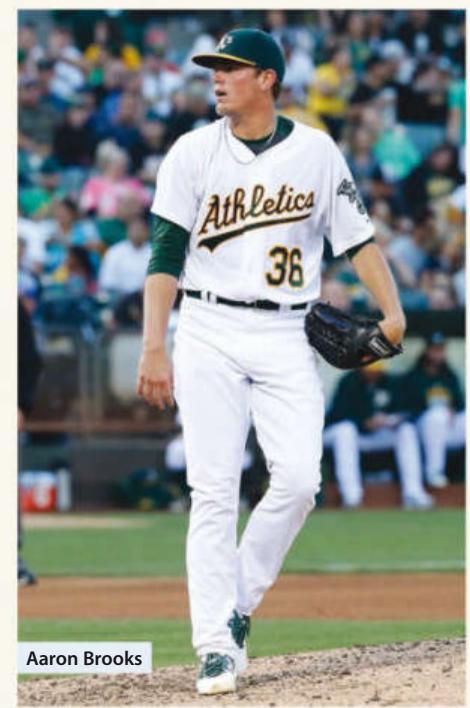
At Cajon High, he set school records in home runs and wins, then attended Cal State San Bernardino, an NCAA Division III program, rather than take walk-on offers from D-I suitors.

The Royals made him a ninth-round pick in 2011.

A'S ACORNS

■ Lefthander **Sean Manaea**, the other acquisition from the Zobrist trade, went 6-0, 1.90 in seven starts at Double-A Midland. He was named Texas League pitcher of the week for the final week of the season.

■ Midland third baseman **Renato Nunez** hit three grand slams in six days, two during the regular season and one in the Texas League playoffs. Nunez battled injuries much of the year, playing in just 93 games and hitting .278/.332/.480 with 18 home runs.



Aaron Brooks

BILL NICHOLS

HOUSTON | Astros

BY JOSE DE JESUS ORTIZ

Remember The Name

HOUSTON Corner outfielder **Jon Kemmer**'s name was not found on any top-prospect lists at the start of the season.

Heck, he arrived at Osceola County Stadium for spring training in March needing to win his job at Double-A Corpus Christi. Yet on a team that included **Carlos Correa**, **Brett Phillips**, **Colin Moran** and **A.J. Reed** for at least parts of the season, Kemmer was the one tabbed the Hooks' 2015 player of the year.

"He came in as a guy who was fighting for a job on that Double-A squad, which he earned," farm director **Quinton McCracken** said. "Most of our kids who are in that position, they have to be opportunistic."

"They have to take advantage when given opportunities. Jon put his best foot forward, kicked the door in and turned himself into a prospect."

It's a testament to the 24-year-old Kemmer's development that Hooks manager **Rodney Linares** said he took more pride in Kemmer making the Texas League all-star team than in himself winning the TL manager of the year award.

The Astros' 21st-round pick in 2013, Kemmer hails from tiny Brewton-Parker College in Vernon, Ga. He established career highs in virtually every category this season, batting .327/.414/.574 with 18 home runs in 104 games. He won the TL batting title and also ranked first in slugging percentage and fourth with 50 extra-base hits.

The Astros' big league outfield is full, but the 6-foot-2, 220-pound Kemmer has earned a shot at advancing to Triple-A Fresno next season for another opportunity to prove that he deserves a look in the majors.

"Jon, he has plus power," McCracken said. "He's very strong. He's a self-made player. What he lacks in probably physical athleticism, he makes up for it in true grit. He's a grinder."

SPACE SHOTS

■ The Astros promoted righthander **Chris Devenski**, the Corpus Christi pitcher of the year, to Fresno to work relief innings during the Pacific Coast League playoffs. He went 7-4, 3.01 in 24 games (17 starts) with the Hooks.

■ Houston promoted third baseman **Colin Moran** from Corpus Christi to Fresno after the Texas League playoffs. The 6-foot-4, 215-pound Moran hit .306/.381/.459 with nine home runs and 67 RBIs with the Hooks.

LOS ANGELES | Angels

BY MIKE DIGIOVANNA

Kubitz's Versatility Tested

ANAHEIM Third baseman **Kyle Kubitz** was thrown for a loop when he stepped into manager **Mike Scioscia**'s office after being recalled from Triple-A Salt Lake on Sept. 8.

"He said, 'Hello, good job this season . . . have you ever played second base?'" said Kubitz, 25.

The Angels acquired Kubitz from the Braves last winter as a potential replacement for **David Freese**, who will be a free agent this winter. But with **Kaleb Cowart** emerging as a third-base candidate and with a possible opening at second base, Kubitz spent much of September working out at second, learning the finer points of the position from coach **Alfredo Griffin**.

"It's going to be a process, but you have to start somewhere," Scioscia said. "We'll see where it leads, long term. We we still view him as a candidate to be an everyday third baseman, but it's not going to hurt him to be able to play second."

The lefthanded-hitting Kubitz hit .271/.357/.433 with a Pacific Coast League-leading 43 doubles, five triples, seven homers and 50 RBIs in 117 games at Salt Lake. He struck out 125 times and walked 60 times in 457 at-bats.

Kubitz, a third-round pick in 2011 from Texas State, already has shown a willingness to adapt by playing left field at Triple-A and in the majors this season.

"The hardest thing is, I've been playing on the left side for so long, to go back to the right side will be a little work," Kubitz said, "but I feel I can do it."

At 6-foot-3, 210 pounds, Kubitz is taller and thicker than most second basemen, and that could be a challenge on the double-play pivot.

"He looks great," Scioscia said after Kubitz's first day of workouts at second, "but all of the things that go into playing second are going to take some time."

ANGEL FOOD

■ High Class A Inland Empire hitting coach **Brent Del Chiaro** will serve in that role for Mesa of the Arizona Fall League, where he will work with Angels players including catcher **Stephen McGee**, first baseman **Erick Aguilera** and outfielder **Chad Hinshaw**.

■ Cuban shortstop **Roberto Baldoquin** struggled at Inland Empire after signing for \$8 million in January, batting .235/.266/.294 and missing half the season with injuries.

SEATTLE | Mariners

BY RYAN DIVISH

Award Season

SEATTLE Shortstop **Drew Jackson**'s first professional season didn't lack for recognition or awards. Despite playing at short-season Everett, the 2015 fifth-round pick might have had the best season of any Mariners prospect.

The 22-year-old Jackson, a Stanford product, was the easy choice as the Northwest League player of the year after putting up huge numbers for the Aqua Sox. His .362 average, .437 on-base percentage, 47 steals and 64 runs all led the league. Jackson walked 30 times and struck out 35 times.

Besides the player of the year award, Jackson also picked up a player-of-the-month award, two player-of-the-week awards and a starting all-star selection.

Jackson was the fifth Mariners prospect to be named NWL player of the year, the most recent had been outfielder **Patrick Kivlehan** in 2012.

"He had a nice season," director of player development **Chris Gwynn** said. "I don't know if we were expecting this from him, but he's got a tool you can't teach—speed."

The Mariners selected the 6-foot-2, 195-pound Jackson in June, and Gwynn admitted he probably should have gone higher.

"He had some injury issues he dealt with in college his first couple years that kind of limited him," Gwynn said.

Jackson hit .207 in 41 games as a freshman and .167 in 39 games as a sophomore. But he had a breakout season this year, hitting .320 (47-for-147) with 27 runs scored, six doubles and two triples.

The biggest question with Jackson will be whether the Mariners want to keep him at shortstop. He made 11 errors in 58 games.

"I think he could be OK there," Gwynn said.

With Jackson's plus speed and outstanding arm, a move to the outfield could happen in the future, but the Mariners have no immediate plans to move him out of the infield.

MARINADE

■ Rob Mumma picked up Northwest League manager of the year honors after leading Everett to a 42-34 record in the regular season and an appearance in the playoffs. He won the same award in the Rookie-level Appalachian League in 2008.

■ Triple-A Tacoma manager **Pat Listach** will manage Aragua in the Venezuelan League this winter. Outfielders **James Jones**, **Jabari Blash** and **Stefen Romero** and lefthander **Vidal Nuno** will play for him.

TEXAS | Rangers

BY JEFF WILSON

Two Of A Kind

ARLINGTON The Rangers loaded up on bullpen arms at the trade deadline, adding **Jake Diekman** and **Sam Dyson**, and turned a glaring weakness into a strength to help their run to playoff contention.

Diekman and Dyson are under the club's thumb contractually, too, and so is rookie **Keone Kela**. So it won't be easy for young relievers to break into high-leverage roles in the Rangers' bullpen.

But lefthander **Andrew Faulkner**, 23, and righthander **Luke Jackson**, 24, have made favorable impressions during the Rangers' September run. The homegrown arms have back-of-the-bullpen stuff.

"In the minor leagues, they logged a lot of innings as starters, which used to be pretty common," big league pitching coach **Mike Maddux** said. "They were able to get a lot of touches, which helps them in the shorter spurts now."

Faulkner, a 14th-round pick in 2011 from South Aiken (S.C.) High, is reserved off the field and calmly sits down opposing hitters by attacking relentlessly. Jackson, a sandwich pick in 2010 from high school in Fort Lauderdale, is a high-octane pitcher who occasionally needs to down-shift.

"Andrew is cold-blooded, really," Maddux said. "Luke is a racehorse, and you have to tame him."

Faulkner took advantage of a few opportunities as a just-in-case player during spring training to put himself in the minds of Rangers coaches. He was used with a lead on Sept. 7 at Seattle and retired five straight hitters. A few of them were righthanders.

Faulkner went to his strength, fastballs in.

"A lot of lefties like to go away, and for some reason I've always liked to throw in," he said. "It surprised a lot of righthanded hitters I've faced. Even if I fall behind, I'm somehow getting it in there enough to where they pop it up or don't barrel it very well."

RANGER ROUNDUP

■ Veteran infielder **Guilder Rodriguez** announced his retirement on Sept. 6 after singling in his final at-bat at Double-A Frisco. The Rangers were considering hiring the 32-year-old as a minor league coach.

■ The Rangers decided that shortstop **Jurickson Profar** would not be activated for the stretch run. Instead, he was sent to Arizona to continue rehabbing his right shoulder and will likely play the field during instructional league.

Diaz tweaks delivery, finds new role

COLORADO | Rockies

BY JACK ETKIN



For statistics, organization reports, prospect lists and recent drafts, check out: baseballamerica.com/t/organization-reports/

DENVER Because he lacked "really good numbers," **Jairo Diaz** didn't envision an eighth-inning role with the Rockies.

He was 3-5, 4.58 in 47 games for Triple-A Albuquerque with 37 walks and 50 strikeouts in 50 innings. But before an Aug. 23 promotion to the Rockies, Diaz pitched 11 scoreless innings in eight outings, allowing seven hits and three walks with 18 strikeouts.

Farm director **Zach Wilson** credits Albuquerque pitching coach **Darryl Scott** with patiently transforming Diaz, 24, whom the Rockies acquired from the Angels for infielder **Josh Rutledge** in December.

ARIZONA | Diamondbacks

BY JACK MAGRUDER

Unexpected Arrival

PHOENIX Lefthander **Keith Hessler** could not have imagined a more surreal debut. Hessler's quick ride to the majors this season was capped when he made his first appearance for the Diamondbacks on the night **Randy Johnson's** jersey was retired before a full house at Chase Field.

"I tried not to focus on how many people were there," said Hessler, 26. "Just kind of ran in and kept my head down and told myself it was just baseball."

Hessler's focus was sharp. He struck out two of the three batters he faced in his one inning of work Aug. 8, a few hours after he was purchased from Triple-A Reno—his third minor league level in 2015.

His rise was slow, then mercurial. Hessler pitched three innings above Class A in his first three-plus seasons after signing as a nondrafted free agent in 2011, after Tommy John surgery in high school and patella tendon surgery at Coastal Carolina set him back. He took off this season, going 5-2, 2.14 with one save in 51 minor league appearances between high Class Visalia, Double-A Mobile and Reno.

Hessler finished 2014 on a roll, posting a 1.86 ERA in his final 14 appearances at Visalia, taking advice from D-backs pitching coordinator **Dan Carlson** and Visalia pitching coach **Gil Heredia** to heart.

"Just needed to be more aggressive," Hessler said. "I decided to take it into my own hands and go after hitters. If they happened to hit it, they did, but it was going to have to be an aggressive pitch."

Hessler is among the lefthanded relievers the Diamondbacks have taken a long look at since **Oliver Perez** was traded to the Astros, a possible companion piece to **Andrew Chafin**, who established himself in the pen this season.

"It's been unreal," Hessler said. "When camp broke, I didn't expect to be here. I was hoping just to make it to Mobile. This locker room wasn't even in my head. Of course I wanted to be here. It was a dream. It wasn't anywhere close to reality."

SNAKE BITES

■ Among the Diamondbacks contingent at instructional league is outfielder **Socrates Brito**, who led the Southern League with 15 triples and was third with 221 total bases. ■ Hillsboro righthander **Carlos Hernandez** struck out seven and gave up one run in six innings to beat Tri-City, 6-1, in the Northwest League championship.

"He was throwing with his upper body, or trying to," Wilson said. "He was throwing with his chest and his arm, and that doesn't work."

"So Darryl did a great job really just kind of simplifying his delivery and letting the very quick arm that he has work, and his lower half work, as opposed to pitching with his upper half."

Diaz, a converted catcher who originally signed with the Angels in 2007 and switched to the mound in 2010, pitches at 98-99 mph with his fastball and has hit 100. His slider sits at 89-90 mph and has reached 92. In 11 games with the Rockies, Diaz has seized the eighth inning, going 0-0, 0.96 with three walks and seven strikeouts in nine innings. He was 10-for-11 retiring the first batter.

Diaz has worked to keep his front side closed, preventing the hitters from getting an early look at the ball. As Rockies manager **Walt Weiss** said:

"A guy throwing that hard with a slider that hard, you shouldn't get hit hard, and he was early in the season."

The stocky Diaz, listed at 6 feet, 200 pounds, said the changes he made with Scott didn't come easily, but he finally learned to stay low and keep his delivery compact.

"When you stay compact, you keep your front side closed longer," Wilson said. "You're going to have a better ability to put the ball where you want. And clearly it's worked for him."

ROCKY ROADS

■ Low Class A Asheville catcher **Dom Nunez** had a .531 OPS with no homers and 13 RBIs in the first half and 1.050 in the second half with 13 homers and 40 RBIs. He finished at .282/.373/.448 with 53 walks and 55 strikeouts.

■ High Class A Modesto outfielder **Raimel Tapia** hit .305/.333/.467 with 12 homers, 76 RBIs, 26 stolen bases and a California League-leading 166 hits. He was below .300 three days in June, bottoming out at .295.



Jairo Diaz

BILL MITCHELL

LOS ANGELES | Dodgers

BY BILL PLUNKETT

Youth Movement

LOS ANGELES When the Dodgers went to Arizona for a September series against the Diamondbacks, manager **Don Mattingly** started a pair of 21-year-olds in the middle of the field—shortstop **Corey Seager** and second baseman **Jose Peraza**.

It was the first time since the last game of the 1947 season that the Dodgers had a double-play combo made up of two players 21 years old or younger. That day **Tommy Brown** (20) and **Eddie Miksis** (19) started at shortstop and second base, respectively, against the Boston Braves.

The Seager-Peraza pairing could be a familiar one in Los Angeles in the very near future.

"They've both showed they can play," Mattingly said. "Josey's come up and done fine . . . Corey's handled himself very well."

Seager was the top-ranked prospect left in the minors before the Dodgers made him a September callup. The plan was to leave him in Triple-A throughout the PCL playoffs but injuries forced the Dodgers' hand.

"You can't always time it perfectly," Dodgers senior vice president of baseball operations **Josh Byrnes** said of Seager's promotion. "He had a good year developmentally and we got to the point where we needed him."

"It got to the point where there were too many scenarios where we can use him."

Seager had hits in his first seven starts, going 10-for-26 in that stretch with four doubles and six walks. He got steady playing time for awhile with veteran **Jimmy Rollins** nursing a minor hand injury.

Peraza has given the Dodgers something they sorely lacked for most of the season—a baserunning threat. Acquired at midseason from the Braves, Peraza had 36 steals in 43 tries between Triple-A and the majors.

"He's an interesting guy. He runs really well," Mattingly said. "He's a guy that gives us some speed and he puts the ball in play."

L.A. CONFIDENTIAL

■ Lefthander **Julio Urias**' first exposure to Triple-A competition did not go well. The 19-year-old was promoted to Oklahoma City in September and made three appearances—two in the regular season, one in the playoffs. He allowed a 15 runs on 14 hits, eight walks and a hit batsman in five innings. ■ Lefthander **Daniel Coulombe** was traded to the A's for cash considerations. Coulombe was designated for assignment in early September in order to clear a 40-man roster spot for outfielder **Chris Heisey**.

SAN DIEGO | Padres

BY TOM KRASOVIC

Renfroe Finds Groove In PCL

SAN DIEGO The organization's top hitting prospect, right fielder **Hunter Renfroe**, showed good staying power this year in his third season since the Padres took him 13th overall out of Mississippi State.

Renfroe played nearly 140 games, counting the playoffs, for two teams based in Texas. For the most part, his performance picked up the longer he played.

Renfroe hit just .184/.229/.263 with Double-A San Antonio in April before he improved in each of the next three months. All told, he played in 112 Texas League games and hit .259/.313/.425 with 14 home runs.

After a promotion to Triple-A El Paso in August, he took advantage of better hitting environments while also plowing through late-season fatigue. He hit .367/.406/.663 with three home runs and 16 RBIs over his final 14 games with the Chihuahuas.

Then it was on to the PCL playoffs.

Renfroe, 23, who batted second in the Chihuahuas lineup, had just three hits in 15 at-bats, but one was a home run off Fresno righthander **Jordan Jankowski**. The reliever had allowed no home runs this season over 55 outings with Houston's top affiliate.

El Paso outfielder **Rymer Liriano**, also 23, batted sixth in the playoffs and reached base in six of his initial 10 chances. He had two doubles. Coming off a year that yielded a career-high 64 walks, Liriano had three walks in the first three playoff games.

Reliever **Tayon Guerrero**, who has been clocked at 100 mph, walked three of four Fresno batters in his playoff debut. All three scored.

With El Paso needing a victory to stay alive, **Casey Kelly** allowed Fresno five earned runs over three innings in Game Four.

The winning pitcher in Game Three was Robbie Erlin, who gave up three earned runs in six innings and outpitched **Mark Appel**—the first pick of the 2013 draft—to deny Fresno a three-game sweep.

FATHER FIGURES

■ Low Class A Fort Wayne fell short of the Midwest League championship series, losing both games to the West Michigan in the Eastern Division semifinals. ■ High Class A Lake Elsinore finished 50-90 and was 22 games under .500 at home for the season. The only worse record overall in the minors belonged to low Class A Clinton, the Mariners' Midwest League affiliate, which was 46-93.

SAN FRANCISCO | Giants

BY ANDY BAGGARLY

The Kid Can Catch

SAN FRANCISCO Trevor Brown was winding down a solid season at Triple-A Sacramento that included a walk-off single in the 13th inning. He topped that on a Sept. 2 game, when his two-out, two-run home run in the ninth sent the River Cats to a 5-4 victory.

But the best was yet to come.

Three days after finishing the season, Brown got his first big league callup when the Giants needed coverage behind the plate after **Andrew Susac** had wrist surgery and **Hector Sanchez** sustained a season-ending ankle sprain. In Brown's second major league start, he caught the third-to-last outing of **Tim Hudson's** career. The 40-year-old righthander blanked the Diamondbacks for six innings to claim his 222nd victory.

Brown, 23, didn't exactly skip school to catch Hudson. He would've been added to the 40-man roster after the season, anyway, to avoid the Rule 5 draft. Giants officials wanted to protect an athletic player with good actions behind the plate and a feel for calling a game. Brown is still relatively new to catching; he played more first base at UCLA, before the Giants made him a 10th-round pick in 2012.

He's proving to be a quick study. Brown hadn't even tossed a baseball back and forth with Hudson before catching him.

"I told him to just mix it up and call whatever you want, and if we get hurt by something, who cares," Hudson said. "We'll get the next guy."

Brown said he went more off the Diamondbacks' swings than anything else. Hudson was able to get his sinker and cutter underneath the barrel, so he kept calling those pitches. He got two double-play grounders. In the fifth, after **Jake Lamb** drew a leadoff walk, **Bruce Bochy** called a pitchout. Hudson fired to Brown, who threw a strike to second base for the out. "It's great that they would show that kind of confidence in me," Brown said.

GIANTICS

■ The Giants also purchased the contract of outfielder **Mac Williamson**, after losing **Gregor Blanco**, **Nori Aoki**, **Hunter Pence** and **Brandon Belt** to injuries. ■ High Class A San Jose trailed 4-0 in the fifth inning of Game Three of a first-round California League playoff series, on the verge of getting swept, but rallied to beat Visalia. **Angel Villalona** hit extra-inning homers to help the Giants win Games Four and Five. San Jose lost to Rancho Cucamonga in the final.

Staten Island deals as New York Wheel rises

BY EVERETT MERRILL

STATEN ISLAND, N.Y.

The Staten Island Yankees' quest for their seventh New York-Penn League title came with off-field distractions in 2015, not the least of which was the construction of the world's tallest Ferris wheel.

The Yankees lost to the West Virginia Black Bears in the league finals, but most of the focus during the season centered outside the Richmond County Bank Ballpark in the congested St. George section of Staten Island.

In an ambitious attempt to draw more tourists to the borough, Staten Island officials are building the New York Wheel, a 630-foot tall Ferris wheel that will carry as many as 1,440 people per ride. It's one of a new generation of Ferris wheels that are designed to be destinations unto themselves, rather than part of another attraction.

Workers began laying the foundation for the attraction in what used to be a parking lot for the ballpark. The New York Wheel is scheduled to open in 2017, but so far it has been a giant headache for the team, with construction severely limiting parking and causing numerous traffic delays. In addition, construction knocked out the Yankees' phone lines for several days toward the end of the season.

"The construction is a deterrent for us," said Mike Holley, Staten Island's senior director of marketing and fan experience. "However, we think the benefit of the wheel will far outweigh the pain we're feeling now."

Holley said plans to alleviate the congestion caused by the lack of parking include the construction of a new 1,250-space parking garage. Under the parking plan, only valet parking will be available in the 820-space left-field lot. Another 1,046 spaces are available to fans at lots around the ballpark, which is surrounded by row houses and small commercial properties.

Staten Island finished seventh in the New York-Penn League with an average attendance of 3,221 this season—a 5 percent dip from 2014.

Holley said the team will change its approach to drawing fans to the ballpark,

which offers a panoramic view of lower Manhattan, to draw more tourists once the wheel is in motion.

"We're working on how we can make that end of the ballpark look attractive," he said. "We want to create a whole weekend experience."

An economic report says that two million people annually ride the Staten Island Ferry, a short throw from the ballpark, but most of them are commuters who head straight home.

In previous seasons, advertising and promotions were not a priority for Staten Island. This season Holley and his staff were aggressive in marketing, advertising and promotions.

With the promotion-minded Brooklyn Cyclones attracting an NYP-best 6,234 fans per game less than 15 miles away, the Yankees employed a targeted advertising campaign with The New York Daily News—something the team shied away from in the past.

They got off to a good start in 2015. A record crowd of 7,483 packed the ballpark on Opening Night against Brooklyn. That was topped by the 7,529 who attended Game of Thrones Night in early August, featuring an appearance by author George R.R. Martin.

"We see what Brooklyn has done," Holley said. "It gives us a model. Whatever works for them should work for us."

"Every weekend we wanted to have a walk-up promotion. Advertising is one thing; making sure people come back is another."

The Yankees have also had a change in the front office. With less than a month left in the season, CEO Steve Violetta resigned, opting not to exercise a two-year contract extension. The Yankees replaced him with Will Smith, who spent the past seven seasons as chief operating officer and general manager of the Trenton Thunder (Eastern).

Attendance On The Rise

Minor league baseball recorded another slow but steady increase at the gate this season. The industry attracted 42,561,445 fans—up a tick from 42,411,194 last year—for the third-highest total in the sport's history.

The Sacramento River Cats (Pacific Coast) edged the Charlotte Knights (International) for the top spot in overall attendance with



New York Wheel will add to Staten Island's view, but it's creating short-term headaches for the Yankees

a late-season rally at the gate. Sacramento, which led the minors in attendance from 2000-08, drew 62,551 fans over its last five home dates to finish at 672,354 in 72 openings. The Knights, in their second year at beautiful BB&T Ballpark, attracted 669,398 in 71 dates while also drawing a minor league-best 9,428 fans per game.

New ballparks and markets have driven minor league baseball's growth since the mid-1980s, and that trend continued this season. The West Virginia Black Bears averaged 2,265 fans during their debut in the New York-Penn League, nearly a 200 percent increase on the team's final year in Jamestown.

The Biloxi Shuckers found similar success in the Southern League despite spending the first two months on the road while construction at MGM Stadium was completed. Biloxi

attracted 164,076 fans despite playing its first 22 games at other ballparks (which counted toward its home attendance total), just over 69,147 more than the team's final season in Huntsville last year. And the Nashville Sounds (Pacific Coast) averaged 7,965 fans—a 62 percent increase in their first season since moving to a new downtown ballpark.

Calculating announced attendance is hardly an exact science, and teams use different formulas to determine how many spectators are in the ballpark each game. Official tallies come after the season, when clubs report turnstile receipts as part of the ticket tax each team pays its major league affiliate. Minor League Baseball insists only that each team use the same method of calculating attendance from year to year.

—JOSH LEVENTHAL

GAINS AT THE GATE

The following teams saw the biggest increase in average attendance compared to last year (minimum 2,000 fans per game).

Team (League)	2015 Total	2015 Avg.	2014 Avg.	Difference
West Virginia Black Bears (NYP)	83,796	2,265	758	198.81%
Biloxi Shuckers (SL)	164,076	2,604	1,460	78.36%
Nashville Sounds (PCL)	565,548	7,965	4,909	62.25%
South Bend Cubs (MWL)	347,678	5,039	3,751	34.34%
Boise Hawks (NWL)	109,945	2,893	2,303	25.62%
Vancouver Canadians (NWL)	215,535	5,825	4,870	19.61%
Oklahoma City Dodgers (PCL)	471,996	6,941	6,045	14.82%
Eugene Emeralds (NWL)	120,931	3,182	2,844	11.88%
Norfolk Tides (IL)	386,402	5,767	5,267	9.49%
Ogden Raptors (PIL)	125,398	3,300	3,014	9.49%

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Laredo retools just in time to claim first title

The Atlantic League's season was still wrapping up, but the rest of the independent leagues have crowned their champions:

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION: All season, the St. Paul Saints and Sioux City Explorers battled for the title of the best team not only in the American Association, but in modern independent league history. When the season ended, the Explorers' 75-25 (.750) record was the second-best ever. But at 74-26 (.740), the Saints finished with the third-best record, just a game behind. (In case you were wondering, the all-time leader is the 1999 Fargo-Moorhead squad that went 64-21, a .753 winning percentage.)

When the American Association season wrapped up, however, neither team took home the trophy. Instead, Pete Incaviglia's Laredo Lemurs leapt from the wild card to the title, bringing the first trophy back to Laredo in the team's fourth season in the league.

In the final month of the season, Incaviglia remarkably remade his team. A trade with Gary brought in shortstop J.D. Pulfer and center fielder Drew Martinez. Travis Denker, one of the team's best players in 2014, returned to the club after his Mexican League season ended. Laredo snatched up catcher Phillip Pohl after the Twins released him, and acquired starting pitcher Matt Sergey from the Frontier League's Washington Wild Things.

Few teams have ever made more adept

moves. Sergey went 2-0, 0.00 in three regular season starts and 1-0, 2.79 in two playoff starts. Martinez hit .412 to lead all hitters in the playoffs. Denker, a former Dodgers prospect, hit .406 with a playoff-best two home runs and eight RBIs. Pohl also hit two home runs and six RBIs.

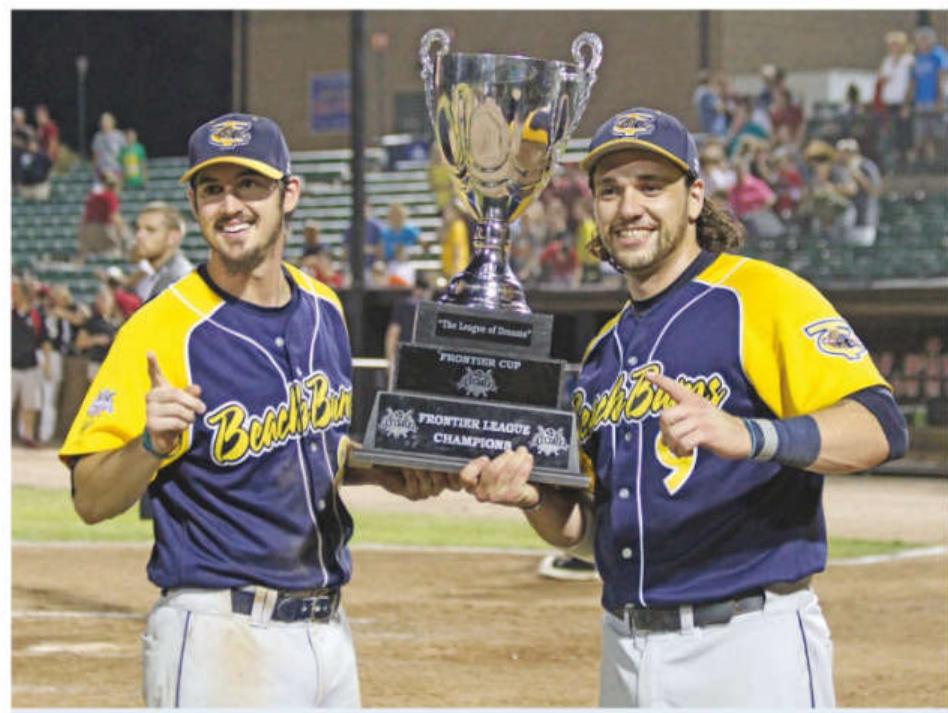
With closer John Brebbia saving five of the Lemurs' six playoff wins with 13 scoreless innings, Laredo edged Wichita 3-2 in the best-of-five semifinals and then topped Sioux City 3-1 in the best-of-five title series.

CAN-AM LEAGUE: When the Can-Am League announced its postseason all-star team, not one player from Trois-Rivieres was honored. If you scan the Can-Am League's leaders, it's hard to find many Aigles.

But in the playoffs, Trois-Rivieres—managed by former big leaguer Pierre LaForest—got hot at the right time, topping New Jersey 2-1 in Game Five of the championship series for its first league title.

FRONTIER LEAGUE: Traverse City finished the season by winning its final three games, then went a perfect 6-0 through the playoffs for its first Frontier League title.

Brandon Jacobs was the star of the regular season and playoffs for Traverse City. After hitting .320/.405/.554 in the regular season, he hit .417 with two home runs in the playoffs. Kramer Champlin was equally dominant. The 6-foot-6 righthander from Arizona State allowed one run in two playoff starts,



Jeff DeBlieux (left) and Jake Rhodes helped earn Traverse City its first Frontier League championship

with 13 strikeouts in 14 innings.

PACIFIC ASSOCIATION: The San Rafael Pacifics won their final eight games, including a 4-3 win over Sonoma in the championship

game.

PECOS LEAGUE: The Santa Fe Fuego edged the Alpine Cowboys two games to one in the championship series of the Pecos League.

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Longtime Lamar coach to retire after season

Jim Gilligan, who has won 1,310 games in 38 years as head coach at Lamar, will retire following the 2016 season, he announced Sept. 21 at a news conference.

"I've already told my ballplayers here about it and I've already told our alumni at our golf event, so now telling the media is the last step of this," Gilligan said. "And then it's time to get to work and try to make this the best year I've ever had."

Gilligan, 68, became the 19th coach in NCAA history to win 1,300 games last season. In all, his career record stands at 1,320-875-5. He is the winningest coach in both Lamar and Southland Conference history.

Gilligan played for Lamar from 1967-1968 and began his coaching career as a graduate assistant at the university in 1970. His first head coaching job came at Western New Mexico in 1972. The next year, he took over at Lamar and spent the next 14 years coaching his alma mater. He then moved on to pro ball for five years, returning to Lamar in 1992.

Soon, for the first time in 25 years, Lamar will have a new coach. Gilligan said it's time for a new voice to lead the Cardinals.

"We have capable people working in our program now that could take this program and not skip a beat," he said.

During Gilligan's career, he has led Lamar to 12 appearances in the NCAA tournament, most recently in 2010. The Cardinals have won 10 Southland championships and two Sun Belt Conference titles. Gilligan has been named Southland coach of the year six times.

Lamar went 21-31 last season, finishing under .500 for just the second time in 15 years. The Cardinals return righthander Will Hibbs, who won the ERA title in the Alaska League this summer, and shortstop Stijn van der Meer, the team's leading hitter last year.

Gilligan said he doesn't have any plans for his retirement yet. He said he will most miss helping players improve and is sure he will find a way to continue to work with players in some capacity.

"I don't enjoy the competition as much as I enjoy the development of players," he said. "I don't have plans yet on what I'm going to do as far as that, but I'm sure I'll do something."

Austin Peay Hires Janssen

Austin Peay State announced Sept. 16 the hiring of Travis Janssen as its head coach. Janssen had recently rejoined the staff at Jacksonville State after spending the last four years as the coach of Division II Northeastern State (Okla.).



Jim Gilligan has coached Lamar for 38 years, leading the Cardinals to 1,310 victories

Janssen replaces longtime coach Gary McClure, who resigned last month after he was caught in a prostitution sting in Clarksville, Tenn.

Janssen, who was so overwhelmed by emotion that he choked up shortly after taking the podium for his introductory news conference, said he is excited for the opportunity.

"This is an unbelievable day for me, an unbelievable situation, unbelievable feelings going through me," he said.

Janssen, a graduate of Kansas State, became

familiar with Austin Peay during his first stint as an assistant at Ohio Valley Conference rival Jacksonville State from 2006-11. He then got his first head coaching job at Northeastern State, which had won just six games in 2011. He helped the Riverhawks improve to 25 wins in his first season and went 104-99 during his tenure. After a 25-24 record this season, Janssen returned to Jacksonville State as an assistant coach in July. While he didn't get into detail about the decision to leave Jacksonville State so quickly, he did acknowledge the unusual track of his offseason.

"There is a timing involved that's so hard to explain, and I think it was a timing that was out of my control," Janssen said. "I think I would be wrong if I didn't mention that. There was a timing and there was a plan that was way, way bigger than anything I ever could have done and I'm humbled to be a part of that."

At Austin Peay, Janssen inherits a team that went 25-26 this spring. The Governors made six appearances in NCAA regionals during McClure's 28-year career, including three straight berths from 2011-2013.

Since winning the OVC championship in 2013 and advancing to the Bloomington Regional final, the Governors have had back-to-back losing seasons. But Janssen said he has high expectations going forward.

"This will be a program where championships will be the expectation," he said. "I believe Austin Peay is a place you can win championships. But you do have to do it on a day-by-day basis."

— *Teddy Cahill*

U.S. 18U program continues world dominance

BY JOHN MANUEL

It used to be rare for USA Baseball's 18-and-under program to win a world championship.

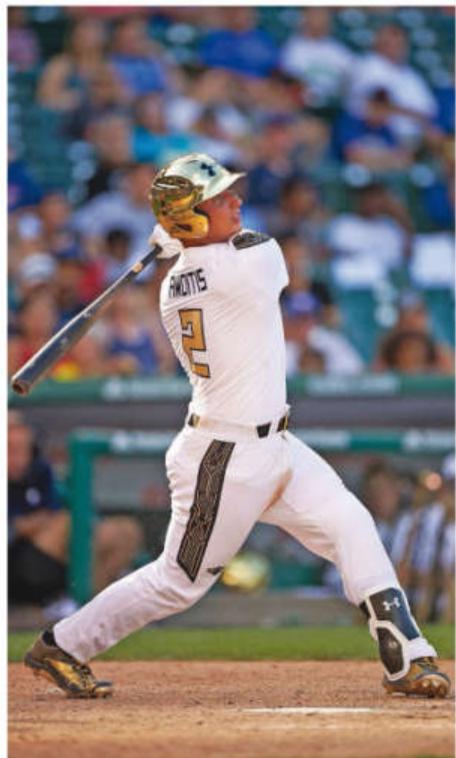
The International Baseball Federation's first 18U world tournament was held in 1981, and the U.S. won the second edition, in 1982. Since back-to-back championships in 1988-89, gold medals had become less common for USA Baseball, with wins in 1995 at Fenway Park (the last 18U championship to be held in the United States) and 1999 in Taiwan.

But at last month's 18U World Cup, USA Baseball claimed its third straight gold medal, beating host Japan in the championship game in front of 15,000 fans at famed Koshien Stadium. It's the first time any country has won three straight 18U world titles since Cuba from 1984-87.

This year's team presented a unique challenge, as two of the top players in the class, pitchers Jason Groome and Riley Pint, weren't on the roster. Head coach Glenn Cecchini (Barbe HS, Lake Charles, La.) and his staff had to adjust without them, though as is often the case in international amateur play, the U.S. has much more pitching depth than other teams.

"There's more gratification with this one," said outgoing 18U national team director Shaun Cole, who was hired by the Padres as a roving pitching coordinator in September. "It was more challenging, it was a World Cup so the competition is greater, the travel was a bear, and we didn't necessarily have those frontline leaders. Last year, we just blew everybody out of the water."

At a time when American amateur baseball is dominated by showcases and travel ball, with more emphasis often on the player's



tools and draft status than on his skills to win games, USA Baseball has had more success in international competition.

"Before I got involved as a coach, I had no idea the time the coaches spend evaluating players," said Cecchini, who has won seven state titles and has worked on the last three

18U staffs. "The process is so labor intensive in a positive way. We really try to get the right 20 guys, and this year was no exception. We know we're going to cut future big leaguers, maybe future Hall of Famers—Mike Trout was cut. It wasn't political, it was all about getting the right guys."

Stars Emerged

Then the staff had to put the right guys in the right spots at the right times. That included batting outfielder Blake Rutherford (Chaminade College Prep, Simi Valley, Calif.) ninth after a slow start and leaving him there even after he headed up. Rutherford wound up leading the team with 14 RBIs and hit its only homer, a three-run shot in a 7-4 comeback win against South Korea.

"It was Shaun's decision to hit him ninth, and I really wanted to move him up when he started hitting," Cecchini said. "But we were winning, and he kept coming up in RBI opportunities. We didn't want to stop our momentum, and to his credit, Blake kept coming through in key situations."

It meant keeping righthander Reggie Lawson (Victor Valley HS, Victorville, Calif.) in for the ninth inning to close out the game against Japan, even though closer Austin Bergner was rested and ready. It meant riding the hot and healthy hand at catcher, as Michael Amditis (Boca Raton, Fla., Community HS) led the team in batting and supplanted Cooper Johnson as the starter after Johnson was hospitalized with a 104-degree fever.

Amditis reminded me of David Ross," Cole said. "He covers the plate well, and he's not just a pull-side hitter. He's got a good two-strike approach and has some juice in the bat

as well. He's a gamer, has a great attitude, is a great teammate and played his tail off for us."

It also meant giving underclassman Nick Pratto (Huntington Beach, Calif., HS) the ball for the gold medal game, as the lefty pitched into the seventh inning and earned his third win of the summer. Cecchini took Pratto aside after the U.S. clinched a spot in the gold-medal game and asked the two-way player, his best defensive first baseman, who should make the deciding start.

"We were close to each other and he looked me straight in the eyes and said, 'Nothing against anyone else, but I believe I'm the best choice,'" Cecchini recalled. "I know what it takes to win. I'm going to go out there and dominate.' And he did."

If only it were so easy. Cole and Cecchini both praised the players for responding to the staff and heaped extra praise on Eric Cressey, who accompanied the team as a strength-and-conditioning coach but did much more. Cressey scouted out gyms for the players to work out in, made sure they had enough protein and Western food, even caught bullpens.

Cecchini said, "Shaun getting him to travel with us was invaluable. Nothing was beneath him—he was amazing." And Cole added, "Whatever it took to help, he did."

That was the case for the 18U program, again. Whoever replaces Cole will inherit a program with high standards—and three consecutive gold medals.

"The dynamics of this year's team, nobody stepped forward and became a leader," Cole said. "But by the end, they were all leaders and turned into a team. They all took ownership, some accountability, and that's to the players' credit and coach Cecchini's credit and the staff's credit."

Fresno routs its way to Triple-A championship

BY JOHN MANUEL

EL PASO, TEXAS

Fresno Grizzlies team president Chris Cummings told the crowd at Southwest University Ballpark that in spring training, Grizzlies manager Tony DeFrancesco predicted to him that the team was good enough to win 85 games.

"I'm pretty sure this one makes 90," Cummings said, selling his manager short by one victory.

"This one" was the Triple-A National Championship game, pitting two teams that already had won titles. Fresno was coming off its first-ever Pacific Coast League championship, while Columbus, the International League winner, was seeking to become the first three-time champ of the winner-take-all Triple-A championship, which was inaugurated in 2006.

The Grizzlies, in their first year as an Astros affiliate, celebrated another first, cruising to a 7-0 victory in front of 9,332 on a gorgeous night in the two-year-old ballpark.

A sign of the realities of Triple-A baseball was the starting-pitching matchup, as Columbus lefthander Ryan Merritt and Fresno righthander Chris Devenski had five regular season Triple-A starts between them—all by Merritt. The two pitchers set the tone for the game, with the tone going all wrong for the Clippers.

Fresno put up a three-spot in the first inning off Merritt, who didn't miss any bats or get any swings-and-misses against a lefthanded-heavy Fresno lineup. Every ball off the Grizzlies' bat seemed squared up, and the Columbus infield had trouble with several hard smashes. Shortstop Erik Gonzalez booted one, a drive by Tyler White eluded Columbus third baseman Yandy Diaz, and after a Robbie Grossman infield single off Diaz's glove, the Grizzlies led 3-0.

They didn't stop against Merritt, chasing him from the game after two innings and five runs, and wound up with 13 hits on the night.

Meanwhile, Devenski dealt en route to earning MVP honors. The day before the game, DeFrancesco said he was hoping to get "three or four innings" out of Devenski, who was pitching in place of Dan Straily after the Astros summoned Straily to the major leagues. Devenski, who spent most of the season in Double-A Corpus Christi, had pitched two innings of relief in the PCL playoffs.

He exceeded everyone's expectations except perhaps his own. He was perfect through five innings before second baseman Audy Ciriaco broke up the no-hit bid with a soft line-drive single to open the sixth. Still, Devenski pitched seven scoreless, giving up only the one hit, going to a three-ball count only once and striking out nine.

"He dominated the game for us," DeFrancesco said. "He was in total control. He made things easy for us."

Devenski dominated by spotting his 88-90 mph fastball, his curveball and completely befuddling the Clippers with his changeup. He said the day before that he'd learned the pitch from Tennessee coach Dave Serrano, who was his coach at Cal State Fullerton, former Fullerton teammate Noe Ramirez, and Kris Medlen, who hails from the same Santa Ana, Calif., locale. Devenski throws it with a unique grip and believes in the pitch, which he called his "circle of death." The offering was death to the Clippers' Triple-A champion-

ship hopes.

Astros farm director Quinton McCracken praised the entire team, which was just 28-22 at the end of May, crediting DeFrancesco's guidance and the organization's depth for providing players to keep winning even after promotions of players such as Carlos Correa to Houston.

"Tony's a winner," McCracken said. "This was his fourth Triple-A championship. We knew with Tony he knows how to win games at this level and how to get the most out of his players."

"The depth of our organization (showed). Some unknown guys like Tyler White come through, he gets his chance and he just hits at every level. Devenski, we've been trying to get him to Triple-A for half the season, but with our depth, the timing of the promotion just didn't work out for him. We got him here for the postseason and look what he's done. He's shown that he can pitch at this level and probably be a big league asset for us."

He was an asset for sure, and now he's a Triple-A National Champion and MVP.

INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE (AAA)

Columbus (Indians) 3, Indianapolis (Pirates) 2: RHP Mike Clevinger spun seven shutout innings and struck out seven, giving the Clippers the boost they'd need to stop Indianapolis and advance to the Triple-A National Championship. Adam Moore, Clevinger's batterymate, was also instrumental helping Columbus advance. The 31-year-old backstop had three hits and an RBI in the decisive game. Outfielder Michael Choice, the series MVP, had three hits in the finale and was 9-for-14 with three homers and six RBIs in the series. Shortstop Erik Gonzalez also homered in the series-clincher. To get to the finals, Columbus defeated Norfolk (also in five games) in the divisional round. In an attempt to boost attendance for the decisive game of that series, Columbus let fans in for free and drew over 10,000. Indianapolis topped Scranton/Wilkes-Barre in a clean sweep to reach the finals.

PACIFIC COAST LEAGUE (AAA)

Fresno (Astros) 3, Round Rock (Rangers) 2: In the biggest game of his professional career, Mark Appel delivered. The 2013 No. 1 overall pick fanned 10 over 5 2/3 innings of three-run ball to boost the Grizzlies into a matchup with the Columbus Clippers, the International League champions, in the Triple-A Championship. Appel navigated a prospect-



Max Kepler hit three home runs in Southern League finals before a big league callup



Fresno righthander Chris Devenski hoists the trophy after his team won the Triple-A championship

IVAN HERRERA AGUIRRE

packed Round Rock lineup that included outfielders Lewis Brinson and Nomar Mazara. The Grizzlies got their offense from the top of the order, including three hits from second baseman Tony Kemp, as well as homers from right fielder Alex Presley and third baseman Tyler White. Left fielder Robbie Grossman also went 2-for-3 with a double, two runs and two RBIs. Round Rock got its offense courtesy of a two-run blast from Drew Robinson. Fresno defeated El Paso in four games to reach the finals. Round Rock swept Oklahoma City in the divisional round.

EASTERN LEAGUE (AA)

Bowie (Orioles) 3, Reading (Phillies) 2: Second baseman Garabez Rosa swatted two homers, and Bowie upended Reading in the winner-take-all fifth game of the Eastern League Championship Series. Besides Rosa, the top of Bowie's lineup also did damage. Designated hitter Corban Joseph and right fielder Mike Yastrzemski combined for five hits—including three doubles—two runs and an RBI. First baseman Trey Mancini, the El's batting champ, walked twice and scored. To win the crown, Bowie had to get past a Reading team armed with a strong prospect nucleus. Righthander Joe Gunkel was up to the task. He limited the Fightins to five hits and a run over four innings before yielding to Nick Additon and Andrew Triggs. Shortstop J.P. Crawford, the Phillies' top prospect, was 1-for-4 in the final game. Right fielder Cam Perkins and catcher Rene Garcia each went deep. Bowie beat Altoona to reach the finals, and Reading topped Binghamton to do the same.

SOUTHERN LEAGUE (AA)

Chattanooga (Twins) 3, Biloxi (Brewers) 2: In its first year as a Twins affiliate, the Lookouts took home the championship. They got past a resilient Biloxi team that spent nearly two months of the season on the road while they waited for construction on MGM Park to be completed. Series MVP Max Kepler homered in the finale, his third of the set, and then was rewarded with a callup to the big leagues. The Lookouts were also buoyed by RBI doubles from catcher Stuart Turner and left fielder Stephen Wickens. On the mound, manager Doug Mientkiewicz called upon a pair of starters, D.J. Baxendale and Jason Wheeler, to silence the Shuckers. The pair permitted just five hits over the course of their shutout and struck out six along the way. Outfielders Michael Reed and Brett Phillips each had two hits for Biloxi. Chattanooga dispatched Montgomery to reach the finals, and Biloxi bested Pensacola in the franchise's first playoff series.

TEXAS LEAGUE (AA)

Midland (Athletics) 3, Northwest Arkansas (Royals) 0: With a three-game sweep of Northwest Arkansas, the Rockhounds claimed their second consecutive Texas League championship. First baseman Matt Olson and third baseman Ryon Healy doubled, and Josh Whitaker homered as part of Midland's 11-hit attack. Whitaker drove in three of his team's seven runs. Righthander Parker Frazier gave the bullpen a night off by spinning a complete-game shutout on 102 pitches. The 26-year-old fanned nine and walked just two in the series-clincher. Midland beat Corpus Christi in the first round, and Northwest Arkansas did the same to Arkansas.

CALIFORNIA LEAGUE (HIGH A)

Rancho Cucamonga (Dodgers) 3, San Jose (Giants) 0: After 21 years, the Quakes can call themselves California League champions again. The Dodgers affiliate took down their Giants-based rivals in three games to take home its first title since 1994. Rancho got a spectacular effort from starter Trevor Oaks, who spun 7 1/3 shutout innings with four punchouts and no walks to claim the win in the series-clincher. Oaks was backed by a huge game from first baseman Cody Bellinger, who went 3-for-5 with two doubles, a two-run homer and three runs scored. Center fielder Alex Verdugo also added three hits, including a double, and left fielder Jacob Scavuzzo contributed an RBI double as well. Relievers Kyle Hooper and Michael Johnson closed the game. San Jose lefthander Christian Jones fanned eight over 4 1/3 one-run innings before handing the ball to a quartet of relievers. Rancho Cucamonga overcame High Desert to reach the finals, and San Jose bested Visalia in their division series.

CAROLINA LEAGUE (HIGH A)

Myrtle Beach (Cubs) 3, Wilmington (Royals) 0: Heartened by the addition of rehabbing major leaguer Jorge Soler, the Pelicans breezed past the Blue Rocks in three games to claim the Carolina League crown in their first year as a Cubs affiliate. Things looked rosy in the ninth inning of the clincher, when Myrtle Beach sent out David Berg to close the game. The former UCLA relief ace hiccuped, however, and allowed Wilmington to tie the game on a two-out single from Mike Hill. Undaunted, Myrtle Beach struck back in the bottom half of the inning with a series-winning single from center fielder Pin-Chieh Chen that plated left fielder Mark Zagunis with the game-winner. Chen had three hits in the finale. Catcher Victor Caratini added a pair of knocks, including a double. Myrtle Beach starter Duane Underwood Jr. gave his team six innings of one-run ball with seven strikeouts. Wilmington starter Alec Mills fanned six in as many innings. Myrtle Beach beat Winston-Salem in their division series, and Wilmington did the same to Lynchburg in their first-round series.

FLORIDA STATE LEAGUE (HIGH A)

Charlotte (Rays) 3, Daytona (Reds) 1: It's not as memorable as a home run, but a walkoff walk will do just fine. That's especially true when it clinches a franchise's first championship, which was the case for the Charlotte Stone Crabs this year. Second baseman Kean Wong drew the free pass off Daytona reliever Evan Mitchell to end a 13-inning marathon. Charlotte got a quick lead in the first inning on sacrifice flies from catcher Michael Marjama and first baseman Casey Gillaspie. Daytona tied the game with single runs in the third and fifth innings, and the teams dueled for seven more scoreless frames before the Stone Crabs claimed victory. The game started as a duel between two of the game's better pitching prospects in Charlotte righthander Brent Honeywell and Daytona lefty Amir Garrett. Honeywell struck out six over six innings, and Garrett whiffed seven over the same span. Daytona beat Clearwater to reach the finals, and Charlotte got past Palm Beach in the first round.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 42

Perkins makes most of chance

BY ALEXIS BRUDNICKI

TORONTO

Carson Perkins could not have asked for a better experience at the third annual Tournament 12.

The 16-year-old righthander from Bienfait, Saskatchewan—a town with a population of 780—arrived at Rogers Centre for the first time in his life on Sept. 13. The next day, he stepped onto the home field of the Blue Jays, his favorite team and one he's watched on television all his life.

On Sept. 15, he took the mound for his Prairies team, composed of players from Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and won with five innings of one-run ball. Two days later, the Canisius commit returned in the semifinal, allowed one run in four innings, and sent his squad to the championship.

After the first inning of that game, Toronto's Marcus Stroman wandered into the dugout to check out what was happening, having flown back from Atlanta ahead of an upcoming start. Perkins immediately strolled up to the big leaguer, introduced himself, and chatted through the half inning until he had to take the mound again.

"I saw him walking over there and I thought there's no way that I can see him and not go talk to him," he said. "Apparently everyone thought that I knew him from somewhere because I just walked right up to him. That was funny. I saw him, and he's one of my biggest idols, so I had to go over there and introduce myself and say hi. It was super cool and I was super excited."

On Sept. 18, Perkins ran onto the field to greet his team when his underdog team captured the Tournament 12 title with a 1-0 victory over Quebec, the third different winner in three years. He was named MVP of the event, and threw out the first pitch at the sold-out Blue Jays game that night before Stroman took the mound for Toronto.

"It's surreal," Perkins said after the championship win. "I didn't see it coming, not at all. I was happy with how I did, but I didn't think I would be the tournament MVP . . .

"This tournament was great for us, because we've got a lot of heart in the prairies, so it's good to come out and show it."

The 6-foot-5, 215-pound righthander is in his second year at the Vauxhall Academy of Baseball in Alberta, where head coach and director of operations Les McTavish has seen Perkins grow into a pitcher deserving of the attention he is just starting to get.

"He's a big, strong kid, and the biggest thing with Carson is when he first came in, he lacked some confidence," McTavish said. "He's always had a good arm and he's got a great work ethic, and as the confidence improved his game just started to take off."

"And he's got one of those infectious personalities that makes people around him better and everybody on his team cheers for him because he's one of those guys. He's happy-go-lucky and one of those kids who is getting everything he's earned."

National Stage

While the event crowns a champion each year, and names an MVP, Tournament 12 is about much more than just the winners, losers and box scores.

The Blue Jays host this event as a showcase for Canada's top high school-aged talent, with Hall of Fame second baseman Roberto Alomar at the helm. It builds on the successes of the Blue Jays Baseball Academy and puts the players in front of a growing number of

scouts and college recruiters, not to mention giving them a chance to play on a big league stage.

"Events like this are tremendous," Baseball Canada's director of national teams Greg Hamilton said. "Young players coming to the Rogers Centre, being on a major league field, and not just on the field but the video board is on, the roof is opening and closing, and it's obvious that there's a commitment and an investment in this, and the kids see it."

"It's not just a drive-by where they're in and out without luster around it. They've been great."

Not only is the event a showcase for the players, but it is also used to develop other facets of the game, with Canadian umpires learning and being evaluated throughout, and young sports journalism students from nearby Centennial College providing coverage for the Canadian Baseball Network website.

"What you've seen here is various people involved in the baseball community across

Canada essentially being involved here," said Stephen Brooks, Toronto's senior vice president of business operations. "From journalism students to elite-level umpiring instruction, to obviously the instruction from our alumni guys to scouts from both college and professional teams, this is a hub of baseball, showcasing talent of the kids from across Canada.

"And all of these people are helping get that message out, that there are very talented kids here in Canada who can play the game."

Hamilton joined Baseball Canada as a guest coach in 1991, just before the Blue Jays won the only two World Series in franchise history, and knows exactly how the team's success can impact Canadian baseball.



Tournament 12 MVP Cam Perkins and his Prairies team took home the title at the event, which serves as a showcase for Canadian talent

"It's tremendous," he said. "It's a one-team marketplace, and that gives you an incredible opportunity to have young Canadian athletes dream of being Blue Jays. As a complement, we'd like to have young Canadian players dream of playing for Canada. That runs complementary to the other."

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Oklahoma ace Hansen could fit at top of draft

BY HUDSON BELINSKY

Alec Hansen could be the first overall pick in the 2016 draft. The Oklahoma righthander has size, arm strength, and can spin both a curveball and a slider.

Hansen has slowly but surely learned how to use his stuff. His ceiling is high, and his steady progress indicates that he could get there. Sooner than later.

In his most recent start this fall, Hansen's fastball reached 99 mph and, according to two scouts, he showed the potential for an above-average or better changeup. His curveball, which has been in his arsenal since high school, has earned grades of average and above-average grades this fall. He'll also show a sharp slider at times.

Hansen is physically-imposing—he's listed at 6-foot-7, 235 pounds, but some guess that he might be an inch taller than that.

"This is what frontline guys look like at this age," one scout said.

The scout, who has seen prep pitchers Riley Pint and Jason Groome, as well as Florida lefthander A.J. Puk, wouldn't say that Hansen is clearly ahead of the rest of the group, but said that, as of now, he believes Hansen to be the No. 1 prospect in the 2016 draft class. That doesn't appear to be a consensus opinion; it's possible that there will be no consensus as to who the No. 1 prospect is.

Suddenly A Prospect

Three years ago, Hansen wasn't famous. He was a known commodity as a senior at Loveland (Colo.) High, but he says that he hadn't really seen himself as a draft prospect until the fall of his senior year. At the time, he was pitching mostly with his fastball and curveball. Hansen's heater would reach 96 mph at points in the spring of 2013, but he and his family valued academics, as well as the social experience that college would offer him.

Hansen also had some soreness in his throwing arm as his senior season came to a close, complicating things as he prepared for the draft. The Rockies selected him in the 25th round, and he chose to go to school.

When Hansen made it to Oklahoma, there

was a new head coach there waiting for him. The Sooners plucked away Pete Hughes from Virginia Tech. It was the beginning of a new era for Oklahoma baseball, but Hughes had inherited quite a bit of talent. As a testament to the strength of the talent, 11 Sooners were drafted in 2015. This meant that Hansen had quite a bit of internal competition.

"Coming in, I knew how I pitched in high school, and I felt like I could do that at any level," Hansen said.

But he didn't pitch much as a freshman, logging just 11 innings, mostly out of the bullpen. He could hit 96, but he didn't have command of his fastball, and he wasn't in control of his long-limbed body.

"When you come here, the hitters are a lot better. You have to command the zone a lot better," Hansen said.

Meanwhile, fellow freshmen Jake Elliott and Sheldon Neuse had hit the ground running. Elliott earned a spot in the rotation, and Neuse was proving himself to be one of the better hitters in the Big 12.

"There's two ways you can take it. You can complain and get upset, or you can push yourself, earn the right to be on the field," Hansen said.

During his freshman year, the righthander began working on a cutter. The pitch had some bite to it, and Hansen began releasing it like a slider. He also began to work on his changeup, which has become a weapon for him.

Following his freshman year, Hansen went to the California Collegiate League. The San Luis Obispo Blues took Hansen for the summer, where he could throw 90 pitches every week and didn't have to worry about potentially losing playing time if he didn't perform. This allowed Hansen to gain confidence. He showed off electric stuff, and steadily improved throughout the summer.

Hansen carried that confidence into his sophomore year. He became a rotation horse for the Sooners, logging more than 80 innings and reaching 99 mph in at least two different outings—against Oregon State and TCU.

"Athletically, he's outstanding, and he's proven that he can make adjustments," Hughes said.



JOHN WILLIAMS

"This is what frontline guys look like at this age," a scout said of Oklahoma junior Alec Hansen

Here Come The Sooners

With Hansen's quick growth, the Sooners could have one of the most formidable 1-2 punches in college baseball this spring. Elliott hit a bit of a lull as his innings climbed in his sophomore year, but at his best, he can command a plus fastball deep into outings.

This summer, neither Hansen nor Elliott pitched, though both would have been welcomed with open arms to whichever team

NATIONAL TEAM TRIALS

USA Baseball announced the 59 players who were selected to compete in 2016 national team trials following the National Team Identification Series (NTIS). Team USA uses the NTIS as a jumping-off point for selecting its national teams.

Players were selected for five different age groups, ranging from the 12U level through the 18U age group, and three players were selected to participate in the 2016 Women's National Team trials.

Below are the players selected for the 18U National Team Trials. For a complete list of NTIS selections, visit BaseballAmerica.com/draft.

Name	Position	Hometown
Haddon Adams	IF/OF	Murfreesboro, Tenn.
Nick Allen	IF	San Diego
Hunter Brittain	C	Brewton, Ala.
Haden Erbe	RHP	Lafayette, La.
Richard Gilbert	LHP	San Antonio
Shane Shifflett	IF/OF	Venice, Fla.
Brady Smith	IF	Niceville, Fla.
Kyle Whitten	RHP	Manassas, Va.

they wanted to play for. Both pitchers felt the fatigue of their sizable jump in innings, and Hughes said that all parties felt comfortable taking the summer off.

"We have to create offseas for our guys," Hughes said. Hansen said that it was a mutual decision, and that he felt comfortable resting and building up for Oklahoma's fall season.

Joining Hansen and Elliott, Neuse has significant draft buzz, too. He's primarily a shortstop at Oklahoma, and has some agility and foot speed, but at least three scouts who saw him playing third base this summer felt that his tools were better suited there. In batting practice, Neuse shows serious over-the-fence power and lethal bat speed, though he struggled at times in the Cape Cod League.

Neuse is also a pitcher, and Hughes said that the Sooners see him as one of the top candidates for the closer job this spring.

On the bump, Neuse's fastball sits in the low 90s, and has peaked at 95 mph. He shows some feel for the strike zone, and has a slider that could become a solid-average offering.

With this crop of talent at Oklahoma, scouts will have plenty of reasons to flock to Norman. Hansen will draw crowds of cross-checkers and scouting directors, and has a chance to force his way to the top of teams' draft boards. If he can continue to improve his consistency and command, Hansen could be the top pick in the 2016 draft.

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Transactions

Transactions involving minor league players, i.e. those not on 40-man rosters, covering the period Sept. 4-17.

BALTIMORE ORIOLES: Released LHP Dana Eveland.

CHICAGO CUBS: Signed 2B Orian Nunez.

CHICAGO WHITE SOX: Released RHPs Evin Einhardt and Brad Salgado, LHPs Chris Freudenberg and Mike Gomez, 1B Ryan Jones and SS Ethan Gross.

LOS ANGELES DODGERS: Traded 2B Darwin Barney to Blue Jays for C Jack Murphy.

MIAMI MARLINS: Signed RHPs Hunter Adkins and Yeremin Lara and OF Jerar Encarnacion.

TORONTO BLUE JAYS: Traded C Jack Murphy to Dodgers for 2B Darwin Barney.

Obituaries

Joaquin Andujar, a righthander who pitched 13 years in the majors and was a four-time all-star, died Sept. 8 in San Pedro de Macoris, Dominican Republic. He was 62.

Andujar is best remembered for his time with the Cardinals in the early 1980s, but he originally came up and spent parts of six seasons with the Astros from 1976-81. He made the first two of his four career All-Star Game appearances as an Astro, first in 1977 and again in 1979, a year in which he split his time between the rotation and bullpen. He made 23 starts in '79 but also 23 relief appearances, logging 194 innings while going 12-12, 3.43. The Astros traded Andujar to the Cardinals in June 1981, making a one-for-one deal for outfielder Tony Scott.

Known for his colorful personality and for dubbing himself "One Tough Dominican," Andujar moved into the rotation full-time with the Cardinals and was the ace of their 1982 World Series winning team. He led the team in most major categories, going 15-10, 2.47 in 266 innings during the regular season, then won all three of his postseason starts, including Game Seven of the World Series in which he worked seven innings to beat the Brewers 6-3. Two years later, Andujar led the National League in wins (20), shutouts (four) and innings (261). He also won a 1984 Gold Glove. He posted a second straight 20-win season in 1985, helping the Cards get back to the World Series. But he struggled to a 7.54 ERA in four postseason appearances, and St. Louis lost the World Series to the Royals.

"We are deeply saddened by the loss of one of the best pitchers in Cardinals history," Cardinals chairman Bill DeWitt Jr. told the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. "Joaquin Andujar was 'One Tough Dominican' who endeared himself to Cardinals fans not only for his great talent, but his unrivaled passion for the game. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family, his friends and his teammates today."

The Cardinals traded him to the Athletics after the '85 season, and Andujar pitched two seasons in Oakland before finishing out his career with one season back in Houston in 1988. He ended his career with 127 wins and a 3.58 lifetime ERA.

Gene Elston, original radio broadcaster for the Astros, died Sept. 5. He was 93.

Elston got his start in broadcasting doing minor league games in 1946. His first big league job came eight years later, when he was hired to call Cubs games in 1954. Elston worked three years in Chicago, followed by a stint working games nationally for Mutual Broadcasting System. He arrived in Houston in 1961, doing radio for the Triple-A Houston Buffs in their final season before the majors arrived with the expansion Houston Colt .45's in 1962.

Noted for his reserved style of game calling, Elston served as the Colt .45's/Astros' radio play-by-play announcer for the club's 25 years of existence. He and the Astros parted after the 1986 season, with Elston moving on to do national broadcasts with CBS Radio. He received the Ford Frick Award in 2006, and was previously inducted into the Texas Baseball Hall of Fame and Texas Radio Hall of Fame.

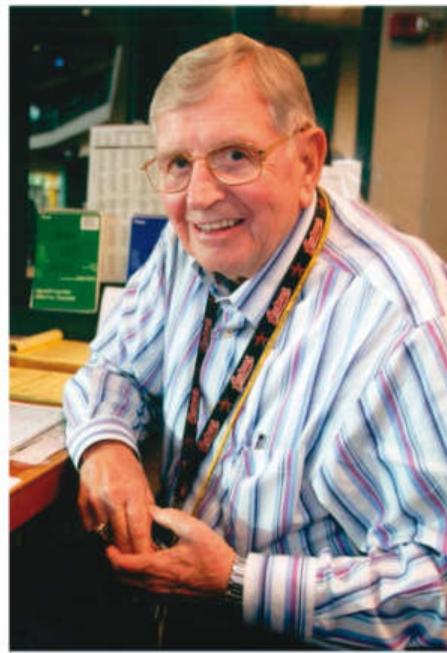
"I tried to put myself in the fan's seat and to tell them what I thought they wanted to know," Elston told the Houston Chronicle in a 2006 interview. "I wanted to do the actual scene at the ballpark. I wanted to follow the ball. When the ball wasn't moving around, I would do color aspects around the stadium."

Milo Hamilton, longtime radio voice of the Astros and a Ford Frick Award winner, died Sept. 17 in Houston. He was 88.

Hamilton served in the Navy during World War II and, after starting his broadcasting career calling college football and basketball, he got his first job in the majors calling games for the St. Louis Browns in 1953. This lasted only one season before the Browns moved to Baltimore, and Hamilton subsequently had stints in the booth with the Cardinals, Cubs and White Sox before landing with the then-newly relocated Atlanta Braves in 1966. Hamilton spent a decade in Atlanta, most memorably getting to call Hank Aaron's 715th career home run in 1974.

Hamilton and the Braves parted ways after the 1975 season, and he worked for the Pirates and a second stint with the Cubs—which ended in an acrimonious split with Harry Caray. Hamilton settled in with the Astros in 1985, working alongside Gene Elston initially and later taking over as the team's No. 1 announcer in 1987. He spent 28 seasons in all with the Astros before retiring in 2012. Along the way, Hamilton got to be on the call for the team's run of success during the Jeff Bagwell-Craig Biggio years, highlights including Houston's run to the 2005 World Series and Biggio's 3,000th hit in 2007.

"Milo's gift was that when the moment was big, he showed the excitement, he gave the moment what it deserved, but not in the way that resorted to screaming," Astros president Reid Ryan told the Houston Chronicle. "His voice



Hall of Fame radio broadcaster Milo Hamilton called Astros games for 28 seasons

was always controlled. It was a true gift."

Hamilton began dialing back his schedule in 2006, for the most part only calling home games and limiting his travel. Although he retired as a full-time announcer after the 2012 season, he continued making weekly guest appearances on Astros broadcasts as recently as June of this year.

He received the Ford Frick Award from the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1992, and was later inducted into both the National Radio Hall of Fame and the Texas Radio Hall of Fame.

"It's a sad day," Biggio told the Chronicle. "It's a sad day for baseball and a sad day for the Astros. I lost a great friend. I love Milo. He was just a great guy and an amazing man behind the microphone. Today is just a tough day."

Riccardo Ingram, an outfielder who played two seasons in the big leagues from 1994-95, died March 31 in Lilburn, Ga. He was 48.

Ingram played baseball and football at Georgia Tech before being a fourth-round pick of the Tigers in 1987. He reached the big leagues at age 27,

appearing in 12 games for the Tigers in 1994 and hitting .217. Following the 1994 strike, he signed with the Twins for the 1995 season and played in four games, spending most of the year in Triple-A. He finished his playing career two years later in the Mexican League, later embarking on a career as a minor league coach and manager. As a coach, he climbed as high as Triple-A, serving as Rochester's hitting coach from 2008-09.

Hank Izquierdo, a catcher who played one season for the Twins in 1967, died Aug. 1 in West Palm Beach, Fla. He was 84.

Izquierdo's pro career spanned three decades, starting when he entered pro ball at age 20 in 1951 and ending with five seasons in the Mexican League from 1970-74, when he was in his early 40s. Along the way, he retired in 1962 to get into coaching, only to resume his playing career after one season away. He got his only callup to the majors in August 1967, making his big league debut with the Twins at age 36. He played in 16 games with Minnesota, hitting .269 (7-for-26). After his playing career ended, Izquierdo worked as a scout for the Twins and Cubs through the late 1980s.

Alex Monchak, a shortstop who played one season in the major leagues in 1940 and enjoyed a long career as a coach and scout, died Sept. 12. He was 98.

Monchak was 23 when he reached the majors with the Phillies in June 1940. He appeared in 19 games through the end of the season, going 2-for-14 at the plate. He joined the Army after the United States entered World War II, most notably fighting in the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944. After the war, Monchak returned to baseball. Although he never got back to the majors as a player, he went into managing in the minor leagues and eventually returned to the big leagues as a coach under longtime manager Chuck Tanner.

The duo of Monchak and Tanner stayed together for many years, across several organizations—White Sox (1971-75), Athletics (1976), Pirates (1977-83) and Braves (1986-88). Monchak's high point came when he served as first-base coach for the "We Are Family" Pirates who won the 1979 World Series. Following his coaching career, Monchak stayed in the game as a scout for several organizations and was honored as a recipient of the distinguished Roland Hemond Award in 2009 at McKechnie Field in Bradenton, Fla. At the time of his passing, he was the third-oldest living major leaguer and the oldest living former Phillie.

Randy Wiles, a lefthander who pitched one season in the majors in 1977, died Sept. 15. He was 64.

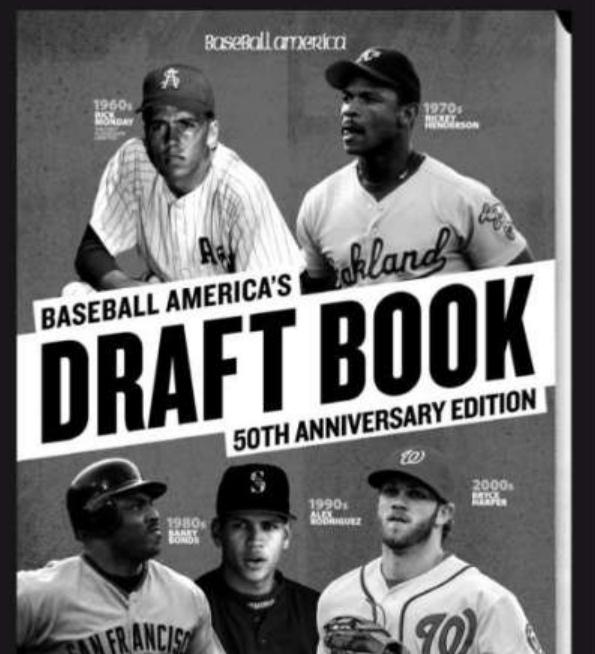
Wiles had a decorated college career at Louisiana State from 1970-73. His seven career shutouts remain a school record, and he was an all-SEC performer in 1972, a season that included his throwing a no-hitter against Rice on March 3. The Cardinals made Wiles a fifth-round pick in 1973, and he reached in the major four years later with the White Sox, following a trade of Wiles for Tony La Russa, at the time a second baseman nearing the end of his playing career. Wiles made five appearances, all in relief, for the White Sox in August 1977, and picked up his only career win on Aug. 8 against Seattle. Wiles was traded to the Astros after the '77 season and played one more year.

Obituary information provided by SABR. Information for minor league obituaries may be emailed to BaseballNecrology@gmail.com.

2015 MAJOR LEAGUE DEBUTS, WITH SIGNING SCOUTS

September

PLAYER, POS, TEAM	DATE	AGE	SIGNED	SOURCE	SIGNING SCOUT(S)	DIRECTOR
Nevin Ashley, c, Brewers	9/9	31	Rays '06 (6)	Indiana State	James Bonnici	R.J. Harrison
Steve Baron, c, Mariners	9/9	24	Mariners '09 (1s)	HS—Miami	Mike Tosar	Tom McNamara
Nefti Ogando, rhp, Phillies	9/9	26	Red Sox '10	Dominican Republic	Manny Nanita	Craig Shipley
Peter O'Brien, lf, Diamondbacks	9/11	25	Yankees '12 (2)	Miami	Carlos Marti	Damon Oppenheimer
Elias Diaz, c, Pirates	9/12	24	Pirates '08	Venezuela	Rodolfo Petit	Rene Gayo
Tommy Murphy, c, Rockies	9/12	24	Rockies '12 (3)	Buffalo	Ed Santa	Bill Schmidt
Ronald Torreyes, 2b, Dodgers	9/13	23	Reds '10	Venezuela	Jose Fuentes	Tony Arias
Jett Bandy, c, Angels	9/14	25	Angels '11 (31)	Arizona	John Gracio	Ric Wilson
Cody Decker, 1b, Padres	9/14	28	Padres '09 (22)	UCLA	Brendan Hause	Bill Gayton
Jay Jackson, rhp, Padres	9/14	27	Cubs '08 (9)	Furman	Antonio Grissom	Tim Wilken
Matt Duffy, 1b, Astros	9/16	26	Astros '11 (20)	Tennessee	Nick Venuto	Bobby Heck
Trevor Brown, c, Giants	9/19	23	Giants '12 (10)	UCLA	Gil Kubski	John Barr
Pedro Severino, c, Nationals	9/20	22	Nationals '10	Dominican Republic	Moises de la Mota	Johnny DiPuglia
Keon Broxton, cf, Pirates	9/21	22	D-backs '09 (3)	HS—Lakeland, Fla.	Luke Wrenn	Tom Allison
Dan Winkler, rhp, Braves	9/21	25	Rockies '11 (20)	Central Florida	John Cedarburg	Bill Schmidt



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Cespedes swings Mets from worst to first



Jayson Stark

Baseball Analyst,
Senior Writer
ESPN.com

PHILADELPHIA

It's that time again, friends. Mid-September. And I don't mean it's time to set your fantasy-football lineup.

I mean it's time for the first edition of our annual September History Watch series, highlighting lots of fun little historic pursuits you may not realize are in progress. And there's only one place to start this September: Flushing, N.Y. Where else?

I don't know about you, but I can't decide which is more ridiculous: Yoenis Cespedes or that team that now employs him, those New York Mets. You decide.

An Historical U-Turn

A mere eight days before the Mets traded for Cespedes—back on July 23—they started a lineup that seems downright incomprehensible now.

Their cleanup hitter was batting .170, with a .565 OPS. That was John Mayberry Jr. Their No. 5 hitter was batting .179, with a .587 OPS. That was Eric Campbell.

The Elias Sports Bureau told us that day that it was the second time in the live-ball era that an actual major league team started No. 4 and No. 5 hitters who both had batting averages that low, after at least 100 at-bats. And the only other team to do it—the 1975 Oakland Athletics—did it the day after they clinched a division title! So they were barely trying to field a lineup.

So “offensive embarrassment” would be a polite way to describe the Mets before they traded for Cespedes moments before the July 31 trading deadline.

Because this is a history lesson, the hard facts are these: From April through July, the Mets were the worst offensive team in their league. Last in runs. Hitting .234 as a team, with a .662 OPS. Averaging 3.5 runs and 0.9 homers per game.

And then they did the greatest legal U-turn of modern times.

Since they flipped the calendar to August, the Mets have somehow turned into the best offensive team in their league. First in runs. Hitting .275, with an .840 team OPS. Averaging 6.2 runs and 1.7 homers per game. Holy schmoly.

So how often has anything like that happened, you ask? Pretty much never. Thanks for your inquiry.

According to Elias, if you don't count strike years, only one other team since 1900 has been last in its league in runs scored from Opening Day through July and then first in runs scored from Aug. 1 on. And that team isn't exactly a perfect comparison.

It was a 1985 Cleveland Indians juggernaut that traded for nobody at the deadline, had no late-season call-ups of note and wound up losing 102 games.

But that's it. So if the Mets keep this up, they'll be the only National League team in history to score the fewest runs in the league through the end of July and the most from August on.



New arrival Yoenis Cespedes was chasing home run history while turning the previously anemic Mets into postseason contenders

Whaddaya know. In a related development, it's time to turn our attention to . . .

Cespedes Vs. The Crime Dog

Back in his previous life, Cespedes hit 18 home runs for the Tigers this season. Then he showed up in New York and turned into Reggie Jackson.

If you're calculating at home, you know that as of Sept. 23, Cespedes needed only one more homer as a Met to equal his total as a Tiger. And that's not just ridiculous, it's potentially historic.

According to the Sultan of Swat Stats, esteemed home run historian David Vincent, just five other players in history have ever hit 17 home runs or more for two different teams in the same season. And here they are:

MULTI-TEAM SLUGGERS

Player	Team	First Team.....HR	Second Team.....HR
Fred McGriff	1993	Padres.....18	Braves.....19
Mark McGwire	1997	A's.....34	Cardinals.....24
David Justice	2000	Indians.....21	Yankees.....20
Manny Ramirez	2008	Red Sox.....20	Dodgers.....17
Afonso Soriano	2013	Cubs.....17	Yankees.....17

USELESS INFORMATION DEPT.

TRIVIALITY

It's only trivial if you don't know the answer.

David Ortiz is one of three active players who have hit more than 130 home runs in any park. Can you name the other two?

» **KNOCKED AROUND, PART I:** Jeff Samardzija has joined Brett Tomko (2003) and Jaime Navarro (1997) as the only pitchers in the last 50 years to give up at least nine earned runs three times in one year. Samardzija, the centerpiece of the deal that sent Addison Russell from the A's to the Cubs last year, yielded 10 runs on 11 hits in just three innings against Oakland on Sept. 15. He was 9-13, 5.27 in 198 innings for the White Sox this season.

» **KNOCKED AROUND, PART II:** Astros lefty Dallas Keuchel put himself in the American League Cy Young Award conversation this season by posting a 17-7, 2.22 record. Then he ran into the red-hot Rangers. In fact, Keuchel had gone 58 starts in a row without giving up six runs in a game, then gave up six in the first inning against Texas.

TRIVIALITY ANSWER: Ryan Howard (185 at Citizens Bank Park) and Miguel Cabrera (136 at Comerica Park).

But you'll notice something about that list: Cespedes has a chance to do something only one other hitter in history has ever done: hit at least 18 home runs for one team, then get traded and hit more home runs for another team in the same season.

Only the Crime Dog himself, Fred McGriff, ever did that—thanks to his fabled Out of the Fire Sale Into the Fire trade from the Padres to the Braves on July 18, 1993.

But what would set Cespedes apart from McGriff or anyone else is the late date of his deal to the Mets. McGriff got just 47 fewer at-bats as a Brave than he got in San Diego back in 1993. But even if Cespedes was to play every day for the Mets the rest of the way, he wouldn't come within 150 at-bats of the 403 he got in Detroit. And he still has a chance to hit more bombs for team No. 2 than team No. 1.

Wow.

So are you catching our drift here? If you've been thinking, “Boy, I've never seen anything like Yoenis Cespedes” or “Wow, I've never seen a team make a turnaround like the Mets,” well, guess what? You ain't hallucinating.

Because this, friends, is the stuff the September History Watch is made of.

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